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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"BREEZIE LANGTON"



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CECILE:

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BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF

'BREEZIE LANGTON,' 'BITTER IS THE RIND,'

ETC.

'In yesterday's reach and to-morrow's,
Out of sight though they lie of to-day,
There have been and there yet shall be sorrows
That smite not and bite not in play.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SAD DAYS AT CHILDERLEY	1
II. PAULINE'S COUNSELS	15
III. A FIRST WORK	38
IV. SUZANNE AS A CRITIC	56
V. TOUCHING THE WOUND	71
VI. THE ANTI-LYSISTRATA	90
VII. EXIGENCIES	106
VIII. ASCOT	124
XI. PAYING FOR PLEASURE	150
X. MR. BUTTERS ON THE FAIR SEX . . .	163
XI. WYNDHAM GWYNNE	172
XII. ALEC CHANGES HIS TACTICS . . .	189
XIII. THE SKELETON IN THE HOUSE . . .	203
XIV. DE VITRE'S LUNCHEON PARTY . . .	217
XV. LORD'S CRICKET GROUND	236
XVI. MADAME LUCE	265

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C E C I L E .

CHAPTER I.

‘SAD DAYS AT CHILDERLEY.’

‘OH Time, terrible divinity!’ cries De Maistre. ‘It is not thy hard-hearted falsity that frightens me; but I dread thy hideous children, indifference and forgetfulness, the slow death of three-quarters of our existence.’

Were it given to us atoms of humanity to make choice of drinking from the waters of Lethe, or filling our cups from the spring of eternal memory, it would be curious to see which vintage would be most in fashion. It is hard to give an opinion upon. We have

the knack of not dwelling much upon unpleasant reminiscences ; but the joyous souvenirs of the past, how we cling to them, lay them to our breasts, and bore our friends with our maundering memories. Truer touch of a master's pencil was never limned than Goldsmith's famous allusion to ' the story of old Grouse in the gun-room.'

And yet there are plenty of wretched lives, their span not bridged, their thread not severed, to whom retrospection is agony ; who would fain drain the bowl of oblivion if they could. It is a fair world and a good estate as handed over to us by our Creator ; but we can hardly, in these times, be pronounced improving tenants, when millions make it their business to lay waste its fairest scenes. Sad to think, but in these days that have fallen upon us I fear the waters of Lethe would be more in vogue.

' Oh Time, oh sons and daughters of Time,'
to think that we shrink from looking backward o'er thy mighty river ; that we should

crave the opiate of oblivion instead of the bright wine of eternal memory.

Sad was Childerley that autumn. Dull indeed when compared with the gay Childerley it had ever been at that time of year, since Cecile had wielded the sceptre. But the shadow of the destroying angel still lingered over it. The miasma of the tomb yet hung around the mansion. True, poor little Bertie had not died there, but in London; yet while the mould of the grave still fills our nostrils with its odour, it matters little where our habitation may be; the pall, the shroud, and the coffin remain with us alway.

The death of her bright sunshiny boy seemed to have wrecked Cecile's life. Wan and listless she moved about, ever looking back at that golden past; shrinking from the contemplation of the dreary future. Her hopes gone; that idol, at which she had so worshipped, shattered. Beautiful is a mother's love for her first-born, but the loss of her child

is no excuse for the negation of all other duties. Despite Sir Hervey's efforts, despite Lia's warm-hearted exertions, Cecile could not put away from her the hysterical idea that her husband held her guilty of her child's death. Morbid fancy though it was, those twain were powerless to dispel it. A wall was gradually building between man and wife, based on this fatal illusion—a partition such as is wont to bring infinite misery, if not disgrace, to those homes where it arises ; dark veil of separation, that leaves the Lares and Penates of the house broken, shattered, scattered in the dust.

‘My dearest,’ urged Lia incessantly—sole visitor that autumn at Childerley—‘Dearest Cecile, for God’s sake disabuse your mind of that horrible idea that Hervey in any way connects you with poor Bertie’s death. Why should you fancy so? He, I know, himself has told you the same.’

‘Yes,’ would reply Cecile, sadly, ‘he has, he does ; half at your promptings I fancy, some-

times, Lia. But he feels all the same that his pleasure-loving wife lost him his boy. I have forfeited the right to ever allude to Bertie again as mine. Kind he has ever been to me ; good and tolerant always ; but he has never loved me, Lia. He never can now. I used to dream once I could win him—that the child he had married might become the woman he should love. It is all past and gone now—day-dreams not to be realised.’

‘Cecile, I don’t know what to say to you. It is miserable to hear you talk in this fashion. Don’t you think Hervey suffers also ? Do you never think of him ? ’

‘Always,’ replied Cecile, softly. ‘I know how he suffers, how he must always suffer, chained to a woman he hates, and who has done him so bitter a wrong. But I suffer too ; my God, Lia, you can hardly realise how much. Don’t be hard upon me because I see too clearly what you would fain hide from my sight. I have told you Hervey has been ever good to me. I know now his compassion is infinite for a wretch that does not deserve it.’

‘My darling, my darling,’ cried Lia, with streaming eyes, ‘what misery are you not garnering for yourself! How could you have possessed yourself of this hideous idea? What pitiful hallucination makes you still cling to it?’

Lady Mallandaine looked at her steadfastly, and spoke not. That dreamy, abstracted gaze, that so often possessed her now, shone out of her eyes—cold, steely, and inflexible. Miss Remington rose from her seat, and taking her place beside her friend, passed her arm around her. ‘Won’t you,’ she whispered, ‘even shed another tear for poor Bertie?’

‘I think not,’ said Cecile, mournfully. ‘Source to me, poor darling, of so much pride and happiness; occasion, also, of such grief, desolation, misery, and reproach, I feel, Lia, as if it were better he had never been. Oh why did they make me a child wife? Why, why, did not Hervey make me a wife in earnest afterwards?’

‘Hush, hush! Cecile, you must not talk like this. You’re mad to utter such things. No husband ever loved wife better than Hervey loves you—none ever was more earnestly desirous of sharing this sorrow with you.’

But Lady Mallandaine shook her head incredulously. On this point her brain was warped—a curious study to see what should come of it when that brain sought relief in action again. And in such case it needs must seek this relief, or else be clothed in darkness, if not for ever, at least for a period.

Grievous indeed were the tidings to the Rector, when Lia, determined to leave no stone unturned, disinterred him from the roots in which he was as usual burrowing. Dried-up, withered, and callous to external influences as such boring, digging, and delving had made him, yet he lit up and recalled himself to this work-of-day world upon the tidings of his daughter’s trouble. That his grandchild was dead, and the cause of such

trouble, barely entered his mind at first, but that Cecile was in sore tribulation moved him much when he was fairly made to grasp it. Difficult to do this at first. Cecile, young and so well endowed with this world's goods, he could hardly picture her in sorrow and dire want of comforting. But when the Rector, thanks to Lia Remington's exertions, fairly comprehended the state of affairs, he put his shoulder manfully to the wheel, and used what influence he possessed over his child to clear her mind of the cloud that hung over it.

Sadly and silently Cecile listened to his exhortation that it was her duty to bear the sorrow which it had pleased Providence to inflict with Christian resignation. She bowed her head, and cast bitter accusation at herself on the point, but on that fatal rift—that

‘Little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly, silence all,’

she would not speak.

Still Lia lingers on. More earnest life in her brown eyes now than is usually given to them, as she broods over the sorrows of her friend; oftentimes she ponders whether she has left a stone unturned that might dispel Cecile's hideous nightmare. She confers on the point anxiously with Sir Hervey, who is grievously distressed at the sad light in which his wife regards their relationship to each other. She is very quiet, very silent, very meek in his presence, but shrinks painfully from all kindness or lovingness at his hands. He, too, is sensitively aware of this, and his honest heart was sore wrung when one night, passing his arm gently round the waist of his young wife, he laid his lips lightly on her brow, and became cognisant of the shudder that ran through her frame at his caress.

Still Lia lingers on. Something might turn up even yet, and Lia feels more sorrowful about her friend than it has ever been Miss Remington's lot so far to feel sorrow

about anything. Could Alec Merriott but see her now, he would be more than ever convinced that this daughter of Mammon was well worth the winning. Laugh! split your cheeks, oh my cynic brethren, when I tell you that I pity these daughters of Mammon more than any of Eve's children. Hawked at from the time they attain marriageable age by kestrels of rapacious tendency and dilapidated nest, they lose all heart to marry unless their lover is of their own weight in ingots. Once more we go back to the Augustan era and '*le culte de la pièce de cent sous.*' When hearts are weighed with gold-dust, the divorce laws should be easy as in the days of the Cæsars, I trow.

It is touching to see the efforts of the Rector to break the cloud that hovers over Childerley and its inmates. He tears himself from his much-loved investigations, and abandons his delving, to walk out with his child. Cecile paces by his side very silent, slightly sullen.

'It is no use, papa ; you, Lia, and Hervey are kindness itself ; but I know how I have been tried, and been found wanting. You are all so good to me that you would fain make me out blameless. That, father, is beyond you all. What I feel, what I think, I can hardly tell. How I suffer I only know, and if you would be still good to me, please leave me to myself. Let me bear the sad memories connected with my darling as I best may.'

And so, at last, they had to abandon all their kindly efforts. The miserable wall 'twixt herself and her husband, erected by Cecile's warped imagination, grew and thickened apace, and Lady Mallandaine settled down into a dull stupor that threatened to defy all efforts of doctors or friends to dispel.

Sorrowfully did Lia make her adieux. Gallantly as she had fought her losing battle, she was fain to tell Sir Hervey at last that she had failed signally.

'I can't shake that miserable idea in the

least, Sir Hervey,' she said, as she bade him good-bye. 'God help both you and her, if it still sways her in the future. But you will be tender with her, won't you?'

'You may trust me, Lia. I am deeply thankful to you for all you have done. You may rely upon it that I shall never forget that Cecile is my dearest and most cherished love. When Lia, at my time of life, we give our hearts away,' continued the baronet, with a melancholy smile, 'we are sure to be very much in earnest. Good-bye.'

Lia made no reply, but, pressing his hand, stepped into the carriage. I doubt if till this moment she had been thoroughly aware of how high was the regard in which Sir Hervey held his young wife; and as the carriage rolled down the long drive from the house to the park gates, Lia pondered over her leave-taking with Cecile. Sorrowful indeed had been that good-bye.

'Lia, my own,' said Cecile, as she embraced her friend at parting, 'do not think

me ungrateful. I know all you have tried to be to me, let alone what you have been. I think you have just saved me from going mad. No,’ she continued, passionately, ‘say no more. I have wept, I have prayed, till weeping and prayer are beyond me. The future is all a blank. Let me wrestle out my woe single-handed now. Would to God I could fairly absolve myself from what lies so heavy on my soul ; but I can’t, darling, and none of you can make me. I know, Lia, you loved poor Bertie well as I did myself ; but then you didn’t desert him, poor innocent, in his need. You are not called on to encounter daily the accusation of his father’s eyes, which say “ Murderess ” when they meet mine. Stop ! don’t interrupt me ; Hervey has told me fifty times he holds me blameless. I don’t think I ever can so hold myself. Hush ! no, not a word,’ and Cecile put her little hand across Lia’s rosy, impatient lips ; ‘I’ll hear no more. You have told me the same for the last six

weeks and, wretch that I am, I know it is but kindness. Kiss me, darling, and go.'

And Lia Remington had laid her lips to her friend's and stepped outside that blue and silken-lined boudoir with more grief tugging at her heart-strings than it had as yet been Lia's lot to know. Wo's me! but the bitterness in life's cup must be quaffed in the salon even as in the cottage.

Madness is but an exaggeration of some one idea dominant in the brain. Observation of asylums will convince the student that their tenants, in the majority of cases, are sane save upon the one point—the point of weakness. Such germ of insanity exists in all imaginative minds, liable to be developed by force of circumstances. Cecile Mallandaine was undoubtedly labouring under a delusion. Though nobody could for one instant impugn the general clearness of her understanding, yet on the subject of her child's death she was in very truth—mad.

CHAPTER II.

' PAULINE'S COUNSELS.'

THE dull grey winter fades slowly away, and is succeeded by spring, with its bright glaring sun and bitter east winds. Very sad has been Childerley all these months, and mournfully Sir Hervey looks back at the desolation that has fallen upon his hearth. Cecile has rallied to a certain extent from the blow Providence has dealt them. She is much changed; since Lia's departure she has hardened in character. I don't mean strengthened; alas! no—that feminine softness the very bloom of the peach, which constitutes the greatest beauty of woman's character, has vanished. There is defiance of the world and its opinion in her brusque manner, in her carriage, in the

very tones of her voice. She, formerly the very incarnation of womanly tenderness and grace, was now hard of demeanour. The soft girlish laughter that was wont to break in such musical peals from her lips had a metallic ring in it now, like laughter that could be both bitter and pitiless.

Cecile's character had altered in fact much since her child's death. There is nothing uncommon in such change. Sorrows chasten and soften our dispositions at times, just as they sour and harden them at others. We hardly recognise this fact enough. We encounter the friend of years ago, and expect to find him, except in personal appearance, the same as of yore. What can be a greater delusion? Wedded to a good sensible woman, and the world prospering with us, we are more tolerant, more liberal—better men, in short—than we were in those days gone by. But a fatal passion for a bad woman, and a weary, sorrowful tramp along life's flinty highway,

have left him jaundiced, cynical, suspicious, incredulous. Poor humanity much resembles wine placed in an uncertain cellar. Put us in the right bin, we improve ; put us in the wrong, we deteriorate.

As long as Cecile remained at Childerley, though her mood at times was hard and defiant, for the most part a sullen apathy seemed to possess her. She would sit, one might almost say for hours, gazing into the fire, and was apt to reply sharply when roused from her abstraction. But when May once more brought the Mallandaines to town, there was an end to all that ; Cecile plunged at once into all the gaiety of the season. A reckless spirit of inquietude seemed to have seized upon her. She who had formerly mixed with moderation in the fierce London whirlpool, seemed now insatiable in her devotion to that trinity of mock idols of which I have before spoken. Dinner, dance, fête or festival, were one and all graced by the presence of Lady Mallandaine.

Gradually too, Cecile changed her set. She shifted, and by no means slowly either, from the more decorous circle in which, as Sir Hervey's wife, she had at first taken her place, into that fast, witty, reckless society, that acknowledged Lady Trillamere and Pauline St. Leger as its high priestesses; a set pretty conversant with the latest odds, the women of which were wont to speculate on most big races, and when they condescended to indulge in croquet liked backing their ball for a sovereign; who read the wickedest French novels and owned it; were by no means innocent of cigarettes; and—worse charge of all—were said to be the best dressed and most agreeable women in all London. How their more decorous sisters did preach against and wail over them! It is hard, when you dedicate your life to the proprieties, to find the despising of them voted so much more attractive.

Lady Mallandaine, formerly so soft, gentle, and womanly, was now as arrant and daring a coquette as any in London. Dress and

dissipation seemed to have claimed her for their own. She numbered many danglers in her train, and of these none perhaps stood in higher favour than Ernest De Vitre, who, it may be remembered, particularly affected this circle, though having the *entrée* to many.

Pauline St. Leger was now one of her most intimate friends, and scarce a day passed without their meeting. The views regarding society inculcated by Pauline’s worldly bitter experience were not calculated to do Cecile much good in her present frame of mind. More than ever did she strive to ignore the past; more than ever did she strive for oblivion in a perpetual draining of the Circean cup, which Mrs. St. Leger and her compeers pressed so continually to her lips. You must always recollect that her mind was warped on that one point—the death of her child. Whatever others might say or think, Cecile blamed herself heavily in that matter. With how little justice we already know.

And what thought Sir Hervey of all this change in his young wife? In secret he brooded sorrowfully over it. To Cecile he once addressed himself in tones of mild expostulation; but she retorted so sharply, that, like the sage,

He let his wisdom go.

No! they two were nothing to each other now. With that one little life all confidence and affection between them seemed to have perished likewise. The destroying angel, when he kills, oftentimes leaves some of the survivors sore wounded; wounded in a fashion that they never recover from till they also lay down the existence that has waxed so heavy of late.

Lia, too, was much troubled at the change in her friend. She did not see so much of Cecile now as heretofore. Though they often met, they had rather diverged in society's paths. Lia thought little of that. She did not at all enter into Sir Hervey's mild horror at Lady Mallandaine's

new friends, although they were not exactly hers. A light-hearted cheery girl was Lia, and not one atom of a prude. Still Mrs. St. Leger was a woman whom she neither liked nor approved, and she was dimly conscious that Cecile had changed for the worse. Moreover, Miss Remington had formed no favourable estimate of De Vitre.

The latter now was a constant visitor in Eaton Square. Cecile, impulsive by nature, held that she owed him a debt that she could never repay, in regard to his rescue of poor little Bertie at that Twickenham water-party. A thorough man of the world like De Vitre, who could, when it seemed good to him, be excessively agreeable, with such strong claim as he had on the Mallandaines, had but little difficulty in establishing himself as *l'ami de la maison*. Of all Cecile's new friends he was the only one that Sir Hervey welcomed cordially; but De Vitre's smart epigrammatic converse pleased him much; moreover he was as

fully alive to the great obligation they were under to him as his wife.

Very devoted indeed had Ernest De Vitre been all this season ; and yet that well-known Twickenham story accounted so easily for his great intimacy that as yet scandal had spared Lady Mallandaine. The club smoking-rooms had so much game afoot at this period, that they had little call to whip for a fresh hare. The censors of London society were so overwhelmed with work as to have no leisure to open up a new case. So this embryo *liaison* passed quite unchallenged as yet—a circumstance much to be wondered at, society's guardians for the most part convicting before the offending has taken place.

Cecile certainly had gone the length of coquetting with De Vitre, but so far never had woman been safer. Her heart was dead within her. The practised *blasé* intriguer who so worshipped at her shrine was by no means so utterly untouched as she. Cecile,

with a sense of what she owed to him, and a real preference in his favour over her other adorers, had conferred upon him the privileges of a *cavaliere servente*.

The season has arrived at its height. The great Epsom carnival is just over. It is the week previous to Ascot. Cecile is seated in the drawing-room of Mrs. St. Leger’s house in May Fair, paying what in London we denominate a morning visit—an experiment not to be attempted except under terms of great intimacy or special appointment.

‘But you know, Pauline, it is very awkward,’ at last remarks Lady Mallandaine, from the depths of the *bergère* in which she sits buried.

Mrs. St. Leger is seated at a dainty writing-table, busied apparently in her correspondence. She raises her head at Cecile’s remark.

‘But, my dear,’ she observes quietly, ‘husbands are all more or less awkward. Yours is by no means a heavy infliction. Of course,

in the first instance, when he wanted you to restrict your acquaintance to his own goodly humdrum circle, you really were being hardly dealt with; but I thought we had changed all that?'

'But, Pauline, I know Hervey will object to my joining this Ascot party. It is awkward.'

'Ah me!' laughed Mrs. St. Leger—a low mellow rippling laugh now, though it could be hard enough at times. 'Ah me! as if our husbands were not always objecting, and then always withdrawing their objections. No, my dear, if that's all your trouble, I don't pity you a bit; only to talk over Sir Hervey. Think of poor me, who have to cajole Elise and half-a-dozen more people, merely to let me have things—dresses, bonnets, &c.—let alone the thought, supplication, and agony attendant on raising the actual sinews of war. Life runs too easy for you, my dear. It would do you good to have a slight turn of difficulties.'

Chronic state of the Honourable Mrs. St. Leger, as it is of many other votaries of fashion in these days.

‘But, Pauline,’ retorted Lady Mallandaine, ‘I detest having words with Hervey about anything. He lets me do pretty much as I like, and is very liberal as regards ways and means.’

‘Cecile, my dear, don’t talk nonsense. Go with me to Ascot you must. Ernest has taken the house for us; and Lady Trillamere and I cannot afford it by ourselves. Besides, our party won’t be complete without you. Absurd! If Sir Hervey don’t altogether feel enamoured of our project when you broach it to him, he will give way, though perchance protesting. Everyone goes to Ascot, and everyone expects to make their expenses. There are certainly times when they don’t;’ and Pauline made a little grimace as she thought of her failure in this wise on one or two previous occasions.

‘There will be words between us,’ observed Cecile, moodily.

‘Of course. Man wedded to woman is always wishing to bring her to his own way of thinking. If it was not an invariable law of nature that their views should be opposite, they would have nothing to talk about.’

‘I don’t quite see that.’

‘No; there are many things you don’t see yet, *ma mie*. Your knowledge of the world is a little circumscribed.’

‘You and Colonel St. Leger, at all events, are not much troubled in that way.’

‘No, indeed,’ laughed Pauline. ‘We don’t even very often see each other; and if it was not for little *gauche* things like you, I might very easily forget his existence altogether, as I dare say he pretty well contrives to do mine. We don’t pull together, you see, Cecile, and have had the sense to go each our own way, without calling upon the public to judge between us. When man and wife appeal to the public, my dear, it always

awards social banishment for life to the woman, whatever it may mete out to the man.'

Cecile looked curiously at her companion. She had more than once felt a strong desire to know the true story of the very peculiar terms upon which Pauline and her husband stood to each other. But this was a point on which neither of them ever opened their lips. There was little to disclose, perhaps, if they had, more than mutual disappointment, disregard, and scarcity of means; the last a prolific source of quarrelling between a spendthrift worldly couple, whose transient inclination for each other had long been of the past.

'I should so like to go,' remarked Cecile meditatively; 'it will be such a pleasant party, and I have never yet been there. I must speak to Hervey about it.'

'Of course you must; and speak authoritatively, too. Tell him you are committed; that, like myself, you have enlisted under Lady Trillamere's banner, and intend to go

to Ascot with just the pleasantest party that Ascot is destined to welcome that week. There, now, that's thoroughly settled. Let me write one note, if I can, before the park is over. I have two or three people coming to lunch.'

Silence stole upon the room, broken only by the scratching of Mrs. St. Leger's pen. Cecile mused over the forthcoming interview with her husband. She knew he would disapprove it; but she had now quite made up her mind to go, and felt little doubt about carrying her point. But ere Pauline's note was finished Sir Alberic Hungerford was announced.

'In the nick of time, Sir Alberic,' said Mrs. St. Leger, as she rose to welcome him. 'You find two ladies who have not been abroad this morning, and who are, consequently, on tenter-hooks for gossip. Make him tell you what's doing, Cecile, and then he shall have something to eat. Meanwhile, I'll finish this.'

A few minutes more, and Ernest de Vitre

and Roland Dance made their appearance. A slight shadow passed over Pauline's face as she welcomed the latter. In good truth she had not meant him to be of her party. It was a matter little likely to discompose Mrs. St. Leger; but she did prefer dealing, if possible, with one admirer at a time. She had been too successful in her career to care now as a rule about parading her victims. Besides, *cui bono* without a gallery? Roland was unexpected. He was too great an *habitué* of those lunches to be deemed an intruder, yet on this occasion he had not been looked for. Calious *intrigante* as she was, Pauline had a weakness for Roland Dance, and would fain spare him as much as she might. She could be tender and kind enough to him on those somewhat rare occasions that found them *tête-à-tête*; but, as we have heard her say, she dealt out to him much gall and wormwood in society. There she made Roland suffer what only those who love well enough to be jealous can be brought to undergo. Mrs. St. Leger

had asked Sir Alberic to lunch for the express purpose of 'shining' on him; which, to carry on my meteorological simile, meant dealing out heavy blight and hard frost in Dance's direction.

Sir Alberic was destined to figure at the Ascot party, and though perhaps as yet not cognizant of the fact, had further assigned to him the *rôle* of being Mrs. St. Leger's banker on the occasion. It might give her a qualm, but Pauline had had too much worldly schooling to let sentiment interfere with matters of more vital importance, and therefore that luncheon was barely likely to be a Sybarite meal as far as concerned Roland.

'To lunch, to lunch, good people! Come along Cecile, and lead the way,' cried Mrs. St. Leger gaily, as she marshalled her party towards the dining-room. 'Will you carve that for me, Mr. Dance?' she continued, as with a nod of her head she indicated the seat opposite her own to Roland, a measure which of course placed Sir Alberic by her side.

The meal progressed pleasantly. Mrs. St. Leger’s luncheons, as I have before observed, were artistic. Pauline could be very agreeable when so minded. De Vitre, when he choose, was a *causeur* of note, and he seldom failed to exert himself in Cecile’s presence. Sir Alberic’s laugh rang fresh and boyish through the room as, cleverly drawn out by his hostess, and warmed by the light of her eyes, it might well do. Roland Dance, albeit he might discern a skeleton at the feast (that is as far as he himself was concerned), acknowledged his obligations to society far too readily to show himself conscious of such spectre, and joined gaily in the conversation.

‘ It’s no use, Sir Alberic ; you must throw over the drag. I’ve great faith in your lucky star, and be of my Ascot party you must.’

‘ Well, I’ll see if I can get out of it,’ replied the baronet ; ‘ I’d much rather go with you, I’m sure.’

‘ See ? ’ laughed Pauline ; ‘ on my faith, Sir

Alberic, when Lady Trillamere, Lady Mallandaine, and myself claim you as cavalier, what fairer excuse need you urge? If that's not sufficient cause for throwing over the entire Household Brigade, or any other collection of male creatures, we will appeal to the public to know what is, Cecile, won't we?'

'I give in, Mrs. St. Leger; I cry for mercy. I have taken your shilling, and am enrolled under your banner.'

'Of course you are, and will be rewarded by joining one of the pleasantest Ascot parties of the year.'

'Mrs. St. Leger is right,' exclaimed De Vitre. 'Summoned, Hungerford, to the feast of roses, and you plead excuse that you have taken a place on a mail coach. Tush, man! you would be hooted out of the town. Error so sacrilegious could never be atoned for.'

'Sir Alberic won't make such mistake,' said Pauline, in those soft, tremulous tones that she could assume at pleasure; and as she spoke

her dark, lustrous eyes flashed upon the baronet in a way that made Roland Dance's teeth grate. 'Pledge me my toast now,' she continued, pouring a few drops of wine into her glass; 'here's a merry and fortunate week to us.'

Lightly pealed the laughter as they replied to the challenge, and then Lady Mallandaine asked De Vitre to ring for her carriage. A general move was, of course, the consequence. De Vitre attended Cecile to the door, and Sir Alberic and Roland also made their adieux. Half-way down the staircase the latter was arrested by a call from Mrs. St. Leger.

'Mr. Dance, please come back for one moment; I've a commission for you.'

Dance stepped back, leaving Sir Alberic, a little discomposed by this request, to make his exit alone. They were jealous of each other, those two, and chafed bitterly as the object of their adoration shifted their respec-

tive weights in the balance ; and how mercilessly Pauline could toy with such scales we can well guess. They were both very much in earnest in the worship of their divinity ; the one with the reckless enthusiasm of a mere boy, the other with the maddening intensity of a man, one who knew all the folly of his pursuit ; who knew that he was but a toy in her hands—that, fierce and reckless as his passion might be for her, she had no real love to give him back ; who felt and believed that no man alive could ever now make Pauline love in earnest. Dance was miserably conscious of all this ; yet he could no more wrench himself free from his infatuation than Sir Alberic, who saw not the dross beneath the tinsel. There is hope for the one when he penetrates the illusion, but the bitterness of his cup must be drained to the dregs by him who, with open eyes, makes sacrifices to the idol he knows to be false and unworthy of adoration. Plenty of such sacrifice perpetually going on, all the same. If you have

not seen a good woman lavish the wealth of her love on worthless man, if you have not seen infatuate man wreck his affection on equally worthless woman, verily you must be a denizen of the Happy Valley.

‘What is it, Pauline?’ said Dance, curtly, as he followed her into the deserted drawing-room.

‘Don’t you hate me, Roland?’ she replied, in low tones, as she leant her elbow on the mantelpiece; ‘I’m sure you ought.’

‘I’m studying hard to that end, if it’s any consolation to you to know it. I can only regret not finding my lesson quite so easy as I could wish. Still you rendered me much assistance last night, and have helped me again to-day.’

‘Roland, don’t talk to me like that. Will you never make allowance for all the difficulties of my position?’

‘Difficulties of your position? I’ll give you that in. Does it ever occur to you that hearts are not quite all counters?’

‘Yes, Roland, often. I bow to your accusation, and know I often use them as such ; but if you would be but reasonable you would know I never held yours in that light.’

‘The distinction is so very delicate, then, that all I can say is, I’ve failed to perceive it.’

‘Come and sit down here ; there, that will do. Listen, Roland,’ she continued, after he had obeyed her behest ; ‘you are foolish not to believe me. Whoever I may flirt with, whatever I may do, I care more for you than for anyone.’ She was standing opposite to him as she spoke, and as she finished she bent suddenly down and kissed him. ‘Good bye,’ she whispered, and vanished.

I should assume it was with the feelings of a man under the influence of opium that Dance once more descended the stairs. From the halls of Eblis to Paradise—such had been his transition in the

last ten minutes. Half-a-dozen sentences from a woman’s mouth, the touch of a woman’s lips, the occasion of such change of feeling.

CHAPTER III.

‘ A FIRST WORK.’

YES! You cannot take up a paper without seeing it. The superfluous pages of the magazines teem with the announcement. You feel rather disappointed that the expected poster is not forthcoming at the railway station. Dead walls and hoardings are curiously inspected. We do not, on the whole, go to bed and wake to fame—that is a favour vouchsafed to the few. But to go to bed and wake the property of the public, is the fate of all who may rush into print. And Alec Merriott, with dire misgivings, has at last abandoned ‘Brought up a Lady,’ in 2 vols. post octavo, to the criticism of an enlightened public.

Alec is unusually nervous. He is always encountering ‘Brought up a Lady’ in some

guise or another. He reads the advertisement stealthily. In his own mess he is afraid almost to take up a newspaper. He thinks his brother officers are smiling at his perusing that advertisement, deep though he may be really in the sporting intelligence. He is unable to divest himself altogether of the idea that everyone knows he has written a novel; that everyone is as sceptical as himself as to his having the slightest vocation in that direction; and that everyone is awaiting with grinning mouth for the castigation that so properly awaits him.

Poor Alec! he little knows that at the outset you are rather fortunate if a review of any note will condescend to tomahawk you. That it takes some months after actual publication before your acquaintance become aware that you have written a book, and that then, as a rule, they are wholly ignorant regarding its contents; unless, indeed, a well-peppered notice has stimulated them to acquire some information on the subject. He

almost shuddered at the sight of the leading reviews of the day, dreading to open them lest he should find himself in the pillory.

Do you recollect a story of Sydney Smith's? It is told in Miss Martineau's 'Biographical Sketches.' 'I remember,' saith the whilom Edinburgh reviewer, 'how we got hold of a poor little vegetarian who had put out a silly little book ; and how Brougham and I sat one night over our review of that book, looking whether there was a chink or a crevice through which we could drop one more drop of verjuice.' Think of perhaps the two most caustic pens of their day, pulling a probably maiden essay to pieces ! Mr. D'Israeli's remark about the critics has become world-famous ; and yet, whoever he may be, some one must let us know when we succeed ; must not mince matters when we are a dead failure. One feels that the critic, like the divine in the pulpit, has things rather too much his own way ; he says his say without interruption, and leaves no opportunity for retort.

Well, I suppose it is best so ; for else the reams we should indite, with a view to making out our own geese swans, would be a somewhat dreary prospect for the public. Alec Merriott, at present, is rather in the position of the little boy shivering on the brink of the river, and who would fain know from his comrades in the water whether it is cold. His teeth chatter as he contemplates the stream, and he is, as yet, practically in ignorance as to whether he can swim or no.

I would give a good deal, if I had it, to know what some of our great literary heroes felt while awaiting the fiat of the public on their first work—work of importance, I mean—that they had as yet achieved ; verdict sometimes that makes a man feel elate, strong, confident, and imbues him with the sense that men have not as yet seen the best of him, but that they *shall* ; verdict sometimes that crushes the heart out, and leaves us doubting of our ability or talent, or at others bracing up the nerves and mind to vow that

the day shall come when the world that at present scoffs shall own that the writer had it in him after all—that he had failed, forsooth, because he had not as yet learnt the grammar of his art. You can no more make books than you can shoes without some study of the handicraft.

Alec is up in London this season, inhabiting a couple of rooms in the vicinity of Bond Street. He has rather kept out of Miss Remington's way of late ; she has become much excited on the subject of his book. Alec is every bit as much on tenter-hooks as Lia, in fact still more so. She has been so kind to him, is so pleased with the attempt, and so sanguine of its success, that Merriott, earnest as we know him to be in his attachment there, feels like a gambler throwing for his last stake. Ruin or success in that quarter, he thinks, tremble in the balance. He would never feel so nervous about the book but for that ; its being matter of congratulation is of great import to him. He is sitting over

the *débris* of his breakfast, musing somewhat moodily as to what may come of it all, when Roland Dance is announced.

‘How are you, Ro? Charmed to see you. What news do you bring?’

‘Not very good, I’m afraid; but, pshaw! man, lots of people’s first productions have not been appreciated.’

‘Book d—d?’ enquired Alec, raising his eyebrows.

‘Well, you’re not praised.’

‘Ah! thought so. Let me light a cigar before you go into particulars. Nicotine soothes the nerves. I shall bear the operation of being flayed alive better under its influences.’

‘Well, you see, Alec, it doesn’t follow you mayn’t get a turn the other way; but I don’t recommend you to be sanguine.’

‘Lord, no! all up, no doubt,’ and Merriott sucked hard at his cigar. ‘Wouldn’t take a thousand to fifteen about it now, would you?’

‘Give us a cigar, old boy,’ replied Dance,

evading the question, 'and then we'll talk it over.'

There was a silence of some short duration, broken at last by Merriott.

'Now, Ro, your weed's all alight; fire away, and let's hear what the prophets say.'

'Well, I've brought down the two papers in which your book is reviewed, and I'm going to read them to you; but I warn you, you won't like it.'

'Fancy not. However, I've had my book reviewed at Tattersall's after a bad Epsom. One didn't like it, but one paid for one's mistake, and got over it. But I had a bigger stake on here, Ro, than pounds, shillings, and pence.'

'Don't I know it, Alec, and know it well; but don't believe that's lost because the reviews speak badly of your novel. That's a long way from being your last trump.'

'Well, I trust I've a card or two left yet. It would have been a double bezique in my hand, though, if I could have made it. Seems

I can't. Crying over spilt milk don't make cheese, and is not much in my way. I'll have another try before I give up Lia.'

'That's it; that's the way I want you to take it. If a woman's not to be wooed in one way, she may be in another. Now to business;' and Dance produced from his pockets a couple of papers. 'Listen; this is what the "Cosmopolitan" says. I am not going to read it quite all. Here's the gist of it:—

“Captain Merriott, we fear, has embarked upon a sea that he is hardly qualified to navigate. The production of fiction requires imagination, keen dissection of character, and a certain facility with the pen; all these are essentials even in the production of fourth-rate fiction. But what are we to say of ‘Brought up a Lady?’ The heroine never in the least realises the title, reminding us all through of a half-educated school-girl. The lack of imagination Captain Merriott displays is unfortunately redeemed neither

by discrimination of character nor liveliness of style. If he will take our advice, he will leave the pen alone and stick to the sabre. It is not long since that most of our contemporaries' columns contained a panegyric on his gallant behaviour during a fire at Aldershott; *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*. It is always difficult to persuade men to confine themselves to their *métier*; but in all kindliness of spirit we would counsel Captain Merriott to abstain from novel-writing in future.”’

‘Hum!’ said Alec; ‘I don’t call that encouraging, do you?’

‘Certainly not; but neither can it be said to be abusive. The fellow, whoever he is that writes it, don’t like your book and says so. I always told you, you know, your heroine was rather stilty.’

‘Yes, I recollect you were deuced rude one day over some MS. I read to you—recommended me to supple her joints and loosen her tongue; in fact, to let her out all over.’

‘Well, I was right.’

‘Dare say you were; always thought she went rather stiff myself. I took a deal of pains with her, too; but it seems I’ve not got her to run kind, after all. What they mean by want of style, I suppose, is that my pen’s got no action,’ concluded Alec meditatively, as he emitted a heavy cloud of tobacco smoke.

Dance nodded assent.

‘Now, you know,’ continued Merriott, ‘I meant to make Clara Somerset, my heroine, no end of a jolly girl; but—but—but I don’t think she is, eh?’

‘Well, the reviews are hard at you now, so there’s no use mincing matters; but I don’t think you have drawn the kind of girl men would be apt to get spoony on.’

‘Meant her to be nice, too,’ mused Merriott. ‘We’ve all an idea, I suppose; that is to say, most of us. Deuced odd we can’t put down on paper what we think.’

‘That’s where it is. We could most of us

write novels if we could but give birth to our conceptions.'

'I fancy that fellow in the "Cosmopolitan" is right. It requires practice, like pigeon-shooting or riding a steeple-chase.'

'True, O king. Should you like to hear what "The Knout" says upon your case?'

'Confound it, you don't mean to say they have given me a turn?'

'Scarifying, perhaps, would more correctly define what they say of you. Shall I read it?' enquired Dance.

'Go on; I can take punishment.'

'"Men, we presume, write novels for some purpose or another,"' quoted Roland. '"It may be for money, it may be to instruct, it may be to amuse, it may be for notoriety, it may be merely to satisfy a *cacoëthes scribendi*; but what has induced Captain Merriott to favour us with the farrago of nonsense it has just been our melancholy duty to peruse, we are at a loss to discover."'

'Damnation!' interrupted Alec; 'I had plenty of motive, at all events.'

'Hush! you can't put that in as a preface. Listen, and be quiet. "Money, instruction, and amusement, we may at once dismiss; as that 'Brought up a Lady' can conduce to any one of those desirable ends must be simply impossible. This gentleman must have rushed into print purely as a relief to himself, or to attain notoriety. If the first was his motive, he has already achieved it. If the second, we can only do our endeavour to assist him to the best of our ability.

"Heaven forbid it should ever be our luck to come across any ladies of Captain Merriott's 'bringing up.' We are not fond of the girls of the period, but they are infinitely preferable in their generation to the piece of insipidity that Captain Merriott has introduced to us as Clara Somerset. Clara, with her mild platitudes, milk-and-water passion, and hysterical remorse about nothing, is really the weakest and most

uninteresting young woman we have encountered for some time.”

‘What an infernal beast!’ growled Alec; ‘I wish I knew who the fellow is that wrote it.’

‘Don’t be a fool,’ retorted Dance. ‘Unless he has written a book too, there would be no vengeance open to you. And even in that case it’s not in the pair of us to cut him up. Unless we could get Egerton Slane to lend us a hand, I don’t think we should make much of it.’

‘Let’s hear the rest,’ rejoined Alec.

‘Well, then comes a ferocious dissection of the book—cannibalism, I should call it. “The Knout” literally devours it after cutting it up; and then polishes you off in this wise:—

“We have added our mite to contribute to Captain Merriott’s notoriety; but would humbly suggest that should he fail to attain that desirable end, as we fear he may, by his present experiment, there are manifold

ways of achieving such distinction connected with his profession, to which it would be far preferable he should direct his attention. In his own interests, ours, and the public’s, we heartily recommend Captain Merriott to ponder over our advice, unpalatable though he may deem it. To the Napiers was it given both to wield the sword and the pen; but as a rule the buckling on of the sword-belt is not wont to make a man a writer of aught but despatches.” ’

‘ Pleasant that, very,’ muttered Merriott.

‘ It’s a deuced deal better than not being noticed at all,’ responded Dance. ‘ Besides, you know, you said once that if you were cut up all your friends would read you at all events, to see what a fool you had made of yourself.’

‘ Quite true, Ro; so I did. But that was theoretically, you see; I hadn’t in those days done it. Practically, I don’t feel quite so keen about it.’

‘ Bah ! never mind ; give us a glass of that

light claret. Somebody may take a lenient view of the book yet.'

'Help yourself,' replied Alec, as he pushed the bottle across. 'You're a consoling beggar, blessed if you're not. "A lenient view."'

'Well, I mean look at it in an opposite light.'

'Now don't be a humbug—the book's a d——d failure. I *did* write it with a purpose—a purpose "The Knout" don't wot of. It's turned out no good; there's an end of it. Question to be propounded is, what's to be the next move?'

Dance glanced at him curiously for a moment. 'You're a lucky fellow, Alec, although you mayn't think so. You love Lia Remington, and will win her some day. What's to be done next? Well, I don't exactly know. You see your two efforts in the intellectual line have been hardly successful.'

'Very much t'other way on,' interjected Merriott.

'Under these circumstances, I think we

must abandon that line, and fall back upon muscular development and the athletics. Women are wont to be covetous of the hero of the hour. Can't you persuade Miss Remington to see you shoot pigeons, ride a steeple-chase, play cricket, or engage in some one of those numberless diversions in which you have already attained eminence. Recollect her hearing about them is not like her being there and seeing for herself.’

‘Well, I might induce her to do that, but it won't be any good. She don't care anything about the cultivation of muscle and manliness. She's all for the intellectual.’

‘It can't be helped; that must be your next card. I've one more in the background when that's played.’

‘And that is?’ said Alec, interrogatively.

‘Never mind,’ laughed the other. ‘Time enough to order up the stormers when you have ascertained that the citadel can be induced to capitulate by no other means. And now I must be off. Good-bye.’

Alec sat looking into the empty grate for some time, then rose and paced the room.

‘Yes,’ he muttered, ‘I think I stand as well with her as anyone. There’s no one I’m in a real funk about, and that’s something; but I don’t progress. I can’t get further than a certain point. Avowed admirer—that’s all right; but declared lover—the minute I verge on that, Lia rather freezes or becomes evasive. I do wonder what she’ll think of the book. Let me look at her note again;’ and Alec stopped, and, unlocking a despatch-box which stood upon the writing-table, selected therefrom a feminine *chiffé*.

‘DEAR CAPTAIN MERRIOTT,’ it ran :

‘I am so pleased to see the announcement of “Brought up a Lady.” I have sent for it, and feel not a little proud that I, to a certain extent, stimulated you to the effort. You may deny it. You are all very loth to admit that most of your good inspirations come from us, though you know it is so.

Still I do hold that I had some indirect share in the launching of “Brought up a Lady.” Do pray come and talk it over. How very quiet you kept it. Who could have given you credit for such secrecy and artfulness?

‘ Yours sincerely,

‘ LIA REMINGTON.’

‘ Hum,’ muttered Alec; ‘ I wonder how she’ll feel at having had an indirect share in producing my friends there,’ and he jerked his head grimly at the table, upon which Dance had left the two newspapers. ‘ One thing is clear. When we meet, I mean her to share the responsibility.’

CHAPTER IV.

‘SUZANNE AS A CRITIC.’

LIA REMINGTON had secured a copy of ‘Brought up a Lady,’ and, despite her predilection for the author, had arrived at the conclusion that the book was of small account. Now, little as Merriott dreamt it, even this did him good service. Lia was thoroughly aware that Alec had never attempted novel-writing but for her instigation. Her note owned as much. This was the second time that love for her had urged him to attempt things beyond his power. There was earnestness in this love that touched Lia deeply. She thought, as well she might, how many of the men who profess to admire me would strive as earnestly as this to please me? If he has failed, can I blame him?

No ; still the man I marry I must reverence. That Alec loves me for myself I know. His is not the love for a good *parti* that characterises some admirers I wot of. Do I love him? Well, not quite. I like him better than anyone else ; but I can’t help laughing at his weaknesses. No, it would never do ;’ and Lia shook her pretty head and looked sagacious as Solomon.

But when Merriott never came near her, and the reviews did, Miss Remington felt it behoved her to pour balm into the wounds of her knight. He had fallen in battle, undertaken at her behest, and all laws of chivalry dictated that it was her duty to tend him in his discomfiture. So she sat herself down, and indited a little note, as follows :—

‘DEAR CAPTAIN MERRIOTT,

‘Why do you keep aloof from us? We have read your book. I won’t be humbug enough to tell you I like it; but I do feel that I am a participator in its production.

If you don't come and talk it over, I will never write to you again.

‘Yours sincerely,

‘LIA.’

And so a little before luncheon one morning Alec appeared in the Remingtons' drawing-room, and was cordially welcomed.

‘Now, Captain Merriott, Mamma may forgive you, but I am not sure I shall. How dare you stay away from us so long?’

Alec muttered something incoherent on the subject of duty. He could be cool enough on the subject of his failure to Dance; could jest at it with his own comrades; but he was very nervous on the point when it came to talking it over with the woman he loved.

Singular fatality, but do not we all know it to be a fact? Man seldom appears at more disadvantage than in the presence of the woman for whom he has conceived a straightforward honourable love. That love once assured, the case is different; but nath-

less let not the ladies think that 'nerves' are an indisposition confined only to themselves. We male creatures suffer quite as much under such infliction, probably more. Self-possession in social difficulties is so much more an attribute of woman than of man.

'Duty, Captain Merriott,' laughed Miss Remington; 'you don't mean to tell me, Sir, that you are going to reckon your duty to the country before your duty to me?'

'Nonsense, Lia,' interposed her mother; 'of course we are always very glad to see Captain Merriott, but we know he has his horses and men and things to look after. It's just like my household work; I must see the housekeeper, cook, and people in the morning, or else you'd get nothing to eat. And I suppose Captain Merriott's horses and people would be much in the same straits if he didn't see about it.' Unconsciously the old lady had enunciated a practical axiom that in time of war is invaluable.

Likely to be of incalculable worth when the new Control Department, so dubiously regarded by all practical soldiers, should come to be tested.

‘We won’t go into that question, Miss Remington; but, but—pshaw! why should I beat about the bush? I didn’t quite at first like to meet you after my failure. I know you expected such much better things from me.’

‘Hush!’ replied Lia softly. ‘Do you think I don’t know that you have got yourself into all this hubbub principally to gratify my vanity? Alec, I am very sorry. I won’t pretend to you that I think you’ve succeeded; but if anyone should sympathise with your failure, it is I.’

Merriott’s pulse throbbed fast. It was the first time that she had called him by his Christian name.

‘You’re very good, Lia. I wished to succeed for your sake. I have failed; still you should be the last to jeer at me.’

'I havn't,' said Lia, quickly. 'You know I never would;' and the honest brown eyes sparkled with indignation.

'No; but can things never be different between us than they are now? Won't you let me ask you for more than pity, Lia?'

'Stop! you are trenching on forbidden ground, Captain Merriott. I thought that was thoroughly understood between us. Sworn friends ever; but don't ask for what I have not to give.'

Miss Remington, perhaps, a little deceives herself upon this point. If Merriott could but wish her good-bye previously to departing for a three years' sojourn in India, it is possible she might change her views about 'what she had to give.' Absence, especially when prolonged, despite Haynes Bayley's assertion to the contrary, I think rather a dubious stimulant to love affairs; but the announcement to the queen of our affections that ere many weeks the salt seas shall roll between us, has been found good reason 'for getting fond'

time out of mind. But then, Miss Remington was well aware that Alec, at all events at present, was not likely to be quartered out of easy reach of London ; consequently there was little fear of her not seeing him.

Merriott walked down to lunch rather grimly after this last rebuff, but it was no use. Lia made a great deal of him, and his brow soon relaxed. We all know the way women can show their solicitude for us in our troubles when they choose ; and when practised by the right women, very soothing to our wounded vanity is such petting. It does not at all follow it must be done by the one lady of our love, but it must be by those whom we are, at all events, fond of. Gall and verjuice is the pity of those we hate at any time, but 'tis never so acrid in the mouth as when bestowed by a woman we dislike. It is not in her nature to refrain from mixing some little exultation at our fall with the compassion she bestows.

Gradually Lia induced Alec to talk about his book, and he listened contentedly enough to her bright genial criticism thereon.

But it was not in the dining-room only that 'Brought up a Lady' was being commented on. The housekeeper's room was occupied by two people who also had much to say on the subject. Mdlle. Suzanne and Joe Butters are there *tête-à-tête*; this book the topic of their converse.

'So your maistare have made a romance, Monsieur Bouttare?' observed the soubrette.

'Yes,' growled Joe. 'Wots he want making books for? I don't think much of them writing chaps myself, unless maybe its Mr. Ruff, who writes the "Guide." He must be a clever 'un, and no mistake.'

'*Je ne comprends pas.* I no understand. I nevare read de what you call him, "Guide," *n'est pas?*'

'No, Maamzelle, it ain't in your way much, you know, but it is in ours; leastway it was till the Capting got fooling with them pens,

ink, and paper. It's all about the racing, you *savez*.'

'Ah! I understand. What made your maistare write a romance, you tink?'

'Lord knows; there ain't no tomfoolery they won't be guilty of at his time of life. They're always jibbing, kicking over the traces, or some other unpleasantness.'

'Monsieur Bouttare, you are *un grand sot*, one very great fool,' replied the soubrette quietly, favouring him the while with a coquettish glance of her wicked black eyes.

'Come, I say,' retorted Joe; 'none of your calling names. I a fool? damme, why there ain't a better judge of a horse in England.'

'*Bon!* You ver good judge of de horse, perhaps, but you know noting about de man or de woman.'

'Don't I. I know you're real nice and very pretty. Skittish as a thorough-bred first time he's backed, to boot.'

'Ah, you tink me pretty,' observed Suzanne, elevating her eyebrows, and pursing up her

rosy lips. 'Psha! I told you you must. You remember, while your maistare make lofe to de mistress, *point d'honneur* dat you make lofe to de maid. You *comprenez*?'

'Well, so I do,' said the somewhat phlegmatic Joe; 'give us a kiss.'

'*Bête*,' laughed the Frenchwoman, with a shrug of her shoulders, 'I tought I had taught you bettare.'

'Damme, so you have;' and Joe jumped energetically to his feet.

But Suzanne was out of her chair and close to the door like lightning. '*Assieds-toi*—you sit down—or I scream,' she exclaimed. 'You ver stupid pupil.'

Joe resumed his seat, discomfited; and with her black eyes sparkling with laughter, the soubrette resumed her chair opposite him.

'So you no comprehend why *le Capitaine* wrote his romance?'

'Not I,' replied Butters, sulkily. He was becoming conscious that his trim companion

was playing with him after her wont. Mademoiselle, indeed, exercised the worthy Joe much. She would put forth every allure-ment of coquetry for his delectation, and, having worked his passion up to fever heat, either snub him or vanish with a malicious laugh.

‘Well, I will tell you,’ resumed Suzanne—‘to pleasure Mdlle. Lydia.’

‘Blessed if I ever thought of that. You’re deep, Maamzelle—deep, very. I’ll be hanged if I don’t think you’re right.’

‘I know I be right,’ replied the French-woman, with a saucy toss of her head. ‘You read de book, Monsieur Bouttare?’

‘Not I. I’ve no time for any such nonsense. I read nothing but the “Sporting Life,” that “Guide” I told you of, and another book or two on training and farriary.’

‘I read him myself,’ said Suzanne, with a malicious smile. ‘Bah! he should take one leetle lesson from my compatriots. *Écoute*—let him study the *roman français un peu*

before he next make a love scene. He want *esprit, verve*—every ting. *Ciel!* his hero make love *comme un vrai Anglais*, like you.’

‘Come, I say, Maamzelle, I ain’t going to stand this. If you can’t be civil, I’m off. And as for telling me a man as could land the winner of the Walcot Open Steeplechase with only one stirrup can’t write a book better nor any one of your nation, I ain’t a going to believe it. Why, I never saw a Frenchman as could ride yet;’ and in the fulness of his wrath, Mr. Butters rose and sought for his hat.

‘You ver unkind to me,’ whimpered Suzanne, making much parade of the handkerchief she had hastily drawn from her dress. ‘Is no one nevere to say’—and here the little crocodile pumped up a sob—‘what one tink [*sob*] about your maistare’s book [*sob*]?’ You treat me very cruel;’ and here Suzanne buried her face in her handkerchief, and became, like Niobe, all tears.

Woman’s weeping upsets the *morale* of

most Englishmen. The astute Joe was no more proof against it than any other of his countrymen. Moreover, he was as very wax in the hands of this artful French girl. Abandoning his intention, he begged her not to cry, said he didn't mean anything, and finally, having been permitted to kiss the apocryphal tears away, sat himself down again in the very seventh heaven of Elysium.

‘Now, Monsieur Bouttare, you no to be rude no more,’ resumed Suzanne, woman-like, returning to her point. ‘I will have my way ; de ladies allowed dat in my country. I say your maistare he no write de lofe scene well, he don’t. *Écoute moi*—he say, “Clara, let me express my adoration ;” but he should say, “*Je t’aime*”—I lofe thee—and kiss her before she has time to answer him. *Mon Dieu!* if he make lofe himself dat way, it must be *beaucoup triste* for Mdlle. Lydia.’

‘Ah,’ replied Joe, sententiously, ‘I twig what you mean now, Maamzelle. There ain’t quite devil enough in it. Now, just

fancy the Capt'ing being found wanting in that. If there was a man in the world who was pretty good at saying, "I loves you, I likes you, and I can't be happy without you," I should have said it was him. It's a pity, it is," said Joe, rising from his chair abstractedly. 'I s'pose they trains off, or else, as a young 'un, I thought he was pretty good at getting his arm round their waists, and all that sort of nonsense;' and, lost in speculation, Mr. Butters in an unconscious manner passed his arm round the soubrette.

'*Scélérat!*' exclaimed Suzanne, laughing, as, wrenching herself free, she sprang to her feet, and dealt a smart box on the ears to her admirer. 'You go too quick. You must make love like your maistare—*pas vite.*'

'Tell you what it is, Maamzelle,' retorted Joe, angrily; 'you're a snake, that's what you are. A regular serpent—there!'

'Ver pretty serpent though, don't you tink, eh, Monsieur?' and Suzanne looked coquettishly at her admirer.

But Mr. Butters, having possessed himself of his hat, was no more to be propitiated. ‘“Serpent!” I said,’ he exclaimed, pausing at the threshold—‘you’re worse. Hark’ee, Maamzelle, you’re the greatest rogue I ever see in training. There’s no telling when you’ll try and when you won’t, when you’ll run straight and when you’ll swerve. I washes my hands of you, I do. Good-bye!’

‘You no shake hands?’ said the French-woman, raising her eyebrows.

‘*Bong jour*, Maamzelle,’ replied Butters, putting on his hat.

‘*Au revoir*, Monsieur,’ laughed Suzanne, as she swept an arch curtsy. ‘Me see you again soon, I tink.’

‘Never, serpent,’ replied Butters majestically, and departed.

CHAPTER V.

‘TOUCHING THE WOUND.’

WHEN your plethoric capitalist or highly respectable banker suddenly smashes, and becomes a defaulter to the tune of half a million or more, conveying desolation and misery into innumerable homes, he is wont to turn up his eyes to heaven and crave for the sympathy of his fellow-men in his misfortunes. He is the victim of disastrous combinations against him. Though investigation may show the rottenness of that whitened sepulchre he called a business, destined to be the tomb of so many hopes and aspirations—aye, loss even of mere bread and cheese to some—yet he still looks upon himself as to be pitied as a man who has failed legitimately in trade.

When Jim Coppinger, most daring and

mercurial of turfites, upon the strength of a fatuous Derby-book, runs some few hundreds into debt, and finds that, his speculation being no better than the banker's or the capitalist's, he also is unable to settle with his creditors, those respectable men of business conceive that it served him right, and that Jim's conduct is a thing offensive to public morality, and by no means to be condoned.

In my obtuseness I a little fail to see why the reckless speculation in the one case is so much more to be condemned than in the other. It certainly was not upon so large a scale, and mankind are wont to have respect for big bankruptcies or big felonies—of course examples must be made. Let us crucify these pettifogging offenders who have presumed to trespass in such miserable fashion; but above all, let us condole with those larger speculators who are driven to the necessity of putting down their carriages. It is sad indeed to think that Mr. Ebenezer Justice, who for the last five years has been

spending some ten thousand per annum of other people’s money, should be deprived of his claret and pineapple. Brillat Savarin, in his chapter on ‘Obesity,’ alluding to the lean kine who carry no flesh, observes, ‘*Ce sont eux qui ont inventé les pantalons.*’ There is much salt in that remark. It may be that, never having been a plethoric capitalist, I also have adopted the pantaloons. The moral I would deduce from the foregoing is simply this—better by far to keep your hands off other people’s moneys; but if you cannot resist picking and stealing, it is safest to do it on a large scale. Floating unlimited companies is safer and far more profitable than fishing for pocket-handkerchiefs.

It was this year that the eminent house of Broderick, Mallard and Company, a discounting firm of almost European celebrity, after carrying on for the last half-dozen years a most extensive business—on paper—suddenly found, from a financial crisis, that their credit

waxed shaky in the market. Not to believe in Broderick, Mallard & Co. was a species of incredulity that rather took the City world's breath away. If they were not safe, pray who were? The sceptical, hard-headed speculators who had suddenly manifested this want of belief vouchsafed no answer, but they steadfastly refused to negotiate any more bills the meeting of which depended upon Broderick, Mallard & Co.

The bloom is soon off the rose, woman's character is easily tainted, light kid gloves are soon soiled; but a mercantile firm's credit, if possible, is sooner stained than any one of these three. From the mere breath of suspicion to a doubt, from a doubt to utter unbelief, is a question almost of hours. That once arrived at, and a panic is the result. All who hold securities of the suspected firm rush to realise them, and, even though it be solvent, bankruptcy is imminent. Broderick, Mallard & Co. not having been sound for some years past, collapsed and toppled over with a

crash that was felt like an earthquake to the remotest corners of the kingdom.

No pettifoggery bankruptcy this. It was no miserable coaster that sank below the wave, but a full-rigged merchantman, with all sail set, that disappeared 'neath bankruptcy's stormy waters, with a full crew and large amount of shrieking passengers on board. It was some time since King William Street had seen the foundering of so mighty an argosy.

Amongst the hapless shareholders in Broderick, Mallard & Co. was Sir Hervey Mallandaine. I don't mean to say that he had a very great stake in that concern—that is, for a man of his income. There was no chance of his being engulfed in the waters—the Maalstroom that swallowed so many encompassed him not within its vortex. He was the holder of some two hundred fifty-pound shares, upon which twenty pounds per share had been paid up. This four thousand was of course gone, and the other

six, for which he stood liable, pretty certain to be exacted. There are always so many men of straw on these occasions that those who have real tangible property are generally mulcted to the uttermost farthing.

I won't say Sir Hervey was not discomposed about the affair. It is given to few of us in this world to possess such colossal incomes that we can afford to view the loss of ten thousand pounds with indifference. But still he bore the blow philosophically. He had a good and unembarrassed property; there could be no difficulty about raising the money, nor, by practising a little self-denial, in paying it off again in two or three years; and here Sir Hervey fell into a gloomy reverie as he thought, *Cui bono?* Why should he trouble himself to leave his property unencumbered? The next heir now was a cousin of whom he knew little. Then arose before him a sweet cherub face, the blue eyes sparkling with feverish light, the fair clustering curls dank with the dews of death; and

he lived over again that night of agony that had reft him of his child—pictured to himself once more the mother's first stony, tearless despair—anon dwelt on the delicate waxen-looking features that should never more relax in smiling recognition of his caress. Then he thought grimly of what his wife had been to him in those days—of what she was now. Better, perhaps, he had taken her more into his confidence beforehand. When their great trouble came upon them, she could not believe in his sharing it with her. Did she know how much he loved her? At his time of life it was hard to make her understand that; those twenty years between them were an insuperable bar. While poor dear Bertie lived all seemed easy; now he could never make her recognise that love.

Well, he is not the first man who has seen his household gods shattered, and sat down to muse sadly amongst their ruins.

A knock at the door, and a footman enters.

My lady would like to see him, if disengaged.

‘Yes; tell her I’m quite at her service;’ and then he thought how only a little year back and Cecile’s fingers would have tapped lightly against the door themselves as herald of such wish.

Five minutes, during which he mused gloomily over the past, and then, arrayed in bonnet and rich attire, Lady Mallandaine swept into the room.

‘Good morning, Hervey,’ she said, as she seated herself; ‘I must apologise for troubling you; I will only detain you a few minutes.’

‘I am in no hurry,’ he replied, quietly.

‘I am glad of that; still I don’t want to be in your way.’

‘You’re never that, Cecile.’

‘It’s most polite of you to say so,’ returned his wife, with a little low laugh. ‘You’re

quite a pattern for the husbands of the day ; still I must not infringe on your courtesy. I want some money, Hervey ;’ and Lady Mallandaine looked a little nervously at her husband.

‘How much?’ he enquired. ‘I don’t want to deny you anything the least in reason, but, Cecile, you used always to find your allowance ample ; you’ve told me so yourself.’

‘Ah ! well, I don’t know how it is, but I can’t make it do now, and you must let me have some more ;’ and Lady Mallandaine toyed nervously with her bracelets.

‘You must recollect, Cecile, this is the third time you have come to me since we have been in town.’

‘I know that, and I want a good deal now. Of course you can refuse me, if you like, but I don’t quite know what I shall do in that case. Go back to Childerley, I think.’

‘You need not do that. What do you want ?’

‘I want two things,’ said Cecile, defiantly; ‘I want a hundred pounds, and I want to go to Ascot with Mrs. St. Leger and Lady Trillamere.’

‘Two things of which I can hardly approve,’ replied the baronet, quietly.

‘Under those circumstances, perhaps the less said the better,’ retorted Cecile, sharply. ‘If you don’t grant the first, you can make your mind quite easy about the second. I shall return,’ she said, rising, ‘to the calm seclusion then of Childerley next week.’

‘Stop a moment,’ exclaimed Sir Hervey; ‘I can’t approve of your spending as much money as you do, but I have not said as yet that you shall not have it. I don’t approve of your going to Ascot with Mrs. St. Leger, but I don’t put any veto upon it. Sit down, and I will write you a cheque for the hundred at once, upon one condition.’

‘That I don’t go to Ascot?’ enquired Lady Mallandaine, pettishly.

‘No. If you choose to go there, after I

have told you it don't meet with my approval, I shall say no more. Things have changed much between us, Cecile, but I don't mean to forfeit my privilege of advising you by any recourse to arbitrary command. I should hope it will never come to that with us. I had rather you did not, that is all.'

'What is your condition, then?' enquired Cecile, curiously.

'Simply that you listen to me patiently for five minutes,' replied her husband, sadly.

'What nonsense! Why you know I would at any time when you have anything to say to me. How absurd you are!' but spite of her words, Cecile felt very uneasy.

This new life she had been leading, though it might have deadened, had far from killed the natural goodness of her disposition. The bloom might be off the rose, but it was no blighted, withered blossom yet. Cecile had a heart sound at the core still, and warm

generous feelings, much as she might try to stifle them.

‘There,’ said the baronet, as he moved from the writing-table ; ‘there’s the cheque you ask for, in the first place ; secondly, it is well you should know that I am hit hard by this failure of Broderick and Mallard’s—that we must to a certain extent retrench. Don’t think that we are ruined, or anything like it, but we shall have to be careful for a while, and you must not come to me again for money in excess of your allowance.’

‘I didn’t know you had lost money,’ replied Lady Mallandaine, reproachfully ; ‘you never told me, you never do—anything about your troubles,’ she murmured softly.

‘They were never much,’ smiled Sir Hervey. ‘Why should I have made sorrow and your bright young life acquainted ?’

‘It would have been better you had, Hervey,’ she replied, sadly. ‘You married a

child, and never would recognise the fact that the child had become a woman.’

Had he but said what he should have said, Sir Hervey’s wife had been sobbing on his bosom the next moment, and much misery had been spared them ; but he suffered from all the reserve and nervous reticence that constitute the curse of our national character whenever anything approaching to sentiment is in question. An Englishman has his weaknesses, and they are manifest enough to those who make study of his character ; but from the duke to the costermonger, from the duchess to the milliner, the thing we stand most in awe of is ‘being laughed at.’

There was silence between them for some seconds. Sir Hervey felt a strange impulse to tell his young wife that he acknowledged he had been wrong, but that he claimed her sympathy for all troubles that might come to them in the future—a right to bring his sorrows for her sharing. Had

he done this, Cecile, in her softened mood, would probably have thrown herself into his arms, and the wall that had arisen between them would have been on the instant broken down. But, unfortunately, he did not. He had met with more than one rebuff in his endeavours to break through the icy crust in which it had pleased Cecile, since her child's death, to enshroud herself. He was not quick at reading the signs of the times, or he might have seen that she was touched at the ready way in which, spite of his own recent losses, he had met her request for money.

There was a strong vein of chivalry in Lady Mallandaine, and her husband's generosity was a thing she was not likely to overlook.

But, so blind are we when such opportunities are vouchsafed us, that, instead of following up the opening his wife had given him, he elected to make his advance towards a thorough reconciliation between them in his own way.

‘Cecile,’ he said at length, ‘you can’t yet, spite of the reckless life you now lead, have altogether forgotten poor Bertie. Won’t you, for his—?’

‘Oh!’ she interrupted—and as she uttered the interjection, her face hardened—‘what makes you speak to me of him? I know how you must hate me whenever you recall his memory. I have suffered enough. Am I always to be reminded of my sin?’ and rising to her feet, Cecile confronted her husband with flushed face and sparkling eyes. ‘Don’t upbraid me. No language you possess can tell me such bitter truths as I tell myself about his death—poor darling! I wonder, sometimes, you can still live under the same roof with me. Better you should say, “Let us part at once,” than that you should inflict such punishment upon me.’

That miserable idea, though it had now for some time been dormant, was as yet far from quenched in Cecile’s brain.

Sir Hervey stood aghast. From his wife’s

butterfly life of late, he had thought she had at last got over that hallucination. He had failed to master the fact that Cecile's recklessness was the result of Cecile's despair—that she sought oblivion in perpetual gaiety, just as another might have resorted to opiates.

‘I did not mean to pain you,’ he replied, gently. ‘I thought that at this distance of time I might touch upon our common sorrow without grieving you.’

‘Common sorrow!’ she exclaimed, bitterly. ‘Do you know what that means to ME? Unceasing, undying remorse. Can't you see that I live so much in the world now because I dare not stay at home with my thoughts? Do you know that last winter I felt at one time I should go mad? You are kind and good to me, Hervey, I know,’ she continued, as her voice softened and the fierce light died a little out of the flashing blue eyes, ‘but between us two there is a gulf that can never be bridged.’

‘Cecile, my wife, don't think so. You are mad now to utter this horrible accusation

against yourself. Listen to me, dearest;’ and as he spoke, Sir Hervev advanced and took her hand.

‘How dare you!’ she exclaimed, snatching it away—‘you, who professed to love him, touch the hand that failed him in his need! Ah!’ she almost shrieked, as a shudder ran through her frame, ‘it is the old call again. Bertie, I come!’ and pressing her hands to her chest, Lady Mallandaine gave an hysterical sob, and would have fallen senseless to the ground if her husband had not caught her.

He placed her on the sofa, rang the bell for her maid, and sent in all haste for a doctor; but Cecile came to herself in a very few minutes, complained of considerable pain in her chest, and retired to her room. A slight attack of angina pectoris, the medical man pronounced it. Whatever that might be, Lady Mallandaine rallied with wonderful rapidity, and the carriage bore her out to a dinner at Lady Trillamere’s that same evening.

Sir Hervey mused long after his solitary dinner, over his interview with his wife. It was quite clear to him now that, upon one point, Cecile was not sane. Her wild rhapsody had accounted to him in a great measure for what had so perplexed him—the total change of Cecile's manner of life. Sadly he recollected that the medical man had cautioned him latterly to abstain from allusion, in any shape, to poor Bertie before her; but then, from her recent ceaseless dissipation, he deemed she had quite recovered from the shock. He recalled to mind now the words of the clever physician who had watched by the boy's death-bed—words spoken after seeing Lady Mallandaine on their arrival in town at the beginning of the season:

‘I am sorry to see, Sir Hervey, you have none of you succeeded in thoroughly removing from Lady Mallandaine's mind the mistaken blame she took upon herself for that poor child's death. Further attempts now are useless. We must simply trust to

time blunting the keen sense of sorrow, and the morbid feeling that has been thereby generated. Don't, as far as you can guard against it, ever let her hear the boy's name even mentioned, for the present.'

Ruefully the baronet reflected upon how he had neglected that counsel, and what had come of it. And yet he fancied he saw the silver lining to the cloud in Cecile's hysterical admission that she simply sought oblivion in society's whirlpool.

CHAPTER VI.

‘ THE ANTI-LYSISTRATA.’

THE smoking-room of the Anti-Lysistrata is hushed in silence, after its wont, when one of its pet members has seized upon the rostrum (that is, the hearth-rug), and is favouring his brethren with his views upon any particular subject. The Anti-Lysistrata is a peculiar club; its principal tenets are unmitigated hatred of woman's ascendancy in any form, and a contemptuous indifference for the ordinary ideas concerning day and night. Need scarcely to say that it was a small club. But if you are under the impression that an institution professing such disgraceful principles was confined to cynical old bachelors, you are much mistaken. It numbered plenty of married men among its ranks, though, to

be sure, they were of that kind which seldom alludes to wives and families.

The big picture over the fireplace in the smoking-room was an inimitable illustration of De Maistre’s idea of the ‘Rape of the Sabines,’ of which, as he tells us, history has given a most perverted account. It represented the Romans going off arm in arm with most coquettish Sabine damsels, while the foreground figure was De Maistre’s maddened Sabine husband, as, with hands raised to heaven, he shrieks aloud in his agony, ‘*Dieux immortels ! pourquoi n’ai-je point amené ma femme à la fête ?*’

‘Cant, cant, cant ! What a world of gammon and spinach it is, my masters,’ quoth Egerton Slane, as, with back to the fireplace and legs rather wide apart, he broke forth into one of those rhapsodies with which he was wont to amuse the smoking-room of the Anti-Lysistrata. ‘Education ! yes, there is nothing like education. What right has a man to hold a military staff-appointment who cannot

answer correctly as to who had the misery or gratification of being Ovid's mamma. You may be able to ride or survey a country ; you may have a tolerable notion of your military duties ; but, you graceless, hapless animal, you know naught about Numa Pompilius or the red-sandstone formation. Away with you, in these days of enlightenment ! bring me some one who is up in the 'ologies. The faculty of organisation and the 'ologies go together. Quadratic equations and military tactics are parallel studies. Education ! cry of the age and a Liberal Government. Away with you to your horn books, youth of England ! Learn the whole doctrine of cant from the masters manifold in the land, who will stuff you like turkeys for the Christmas market ; and then air your knowledge at those competitive examinations on which we place such implicit reliance—knowledge that we well know departs like last year's snows, such examination once passed. The world turns round quick now-a-days, and if you've not time to

acquire knowledge, it is no fault of yours. Simulation of much lore is made easy for you, and display of superficial wisdom will meet the requirements of the Brummagem days we live in. Never plead ignorance, never be diffident. State your views, oh youth of this generation! with confidence and fluency. There are plenty credulous in the land, providing only you are antagonistic to old beliefs and recognised laws. Only take up any subject in a new light, and whether you have any knowledge on such subject is matter of small import; you shall be hailed a prophet and have numberless disciples. Give us novelty—that is all we ask. In days when Walt Whitman is hailed a poet, who need despair? Break fresh ground, whether it is in politics or poetry, religion or speculation, and you shall have followers. It is an enlightened age, and Aladdin would have done a wonderful business in this generation. "New lamps for old" is what we are all craving for. We don't examine the workmanship of the new

lamps much. It is sufficient for us they are new, and therefore better than those old lights of our forefathers. Progressive we are very ; we have reduced hypocrisy to a science, and cant to a creed.'

'There, my friends,' said Slane, as he sat down, laughing. 'A prophet has arisen in Israel, and you knew him not. Isn't it so?'

'Well, Egerton,' laughed Jim Durant (affiliated to many papers), 'we've seen you taken this way before, you know. I suppose that's the gist of what you wanted to write for your morrow's leader, and which your editor most properly suppressed.'

'You're an atheistical brute,' retorted Slane, 'and I'll waste the results of my observation and experience on you no more. The time will come when you will acknowledge that I looked with the eye of the sage on the days we live in.'

'And ask you to dinner in atonement, Egerton,' interrupted the other. 'Never

mind, I'm going to throw a sop to Cerberus now. I've a little story for you.'

'Ah, I rather like your little historiettes. Nothing but your talent for scandal, Jim, has saved you from being kicked out of decent society long ago. Drive on.'

'Well, you know Marmaduke Popples?'

Slane nodded assent.

'Thinks himself a poet, you know. Wrote "Voices from the Air," "The Growlings of the Deep," &c. Well, Popples, it seems, went down into the country to stay with Jack Raffleton; and Jack, as the story goes, wondered in his own mind rather what he was to do with him. So the first day he blandly enquired whether Popples would hunt.'

'I never hunt,' replied Marm, grimly.

'Well,' continued Jack, 'if you won't hunt, will you shoot?'

'I never shoot,' observed Popples, gravely.

'Confound it,' said Raffleton, 'what the deuce do you do?'

‘Do, Sir? I write,’ responded Marm, loftily, with his nose well in the air.

‘No harm in that,’ replied Jack—‘*I never read.*’

‘Not bad,’ laughed Slane; ‘and knowing the two men, I can so thoroughly appreciate the joke. I can fancy Marm’s face on the occasion. Halloo! why here’s De Vitre.

“Hail to the chief who in triumph advances,
Honoured and blest be the evergreen pine”—

meaning yourself, most worthy secretary, vice-secretary, or whatever you dub yourself. How’s the department? Neither Durant nor I have had a shot at you this long while.’

‘Oh, never mind us,’ said De Vitre, as he shook hands with the pair, and then dropped into the adjacent easy-chair. ‘We don’t much mind your attacks, you know. Still we’d rather you didn’t. Considering the lots of corners there are that want brooming out, I always think it rather hard lines that you two literary housemaids should come and interfere with cobwebs presided over by a spider

with whom you are on friendly terms. You might be down upon the spiders you don't know, to begin with.'

'The fact is, my dear De Vitre, and you are quite as well aware of it as I am, that, bar the War Department, the Fiddle and String is the most utterly rotten bit of machinery in the whole fabric of our Government. We are forced to have a turn at the gear of the State coach now and then, when there's a dearth of news in the land. There's not much difficulty about finding a weak place anywhere, but you and the War Office are a sure find. It's less trouble. You see what I mean? You've always just made a mistake or manage to make one before we can pick a hole elsewhere.'

'All very well, Egerton, but the real truth is, that they are the only two departments of the State of the workings of which you have the slightest cognisance. By the way, somebody told me that Wyndham Gwynne either

is or was to be shortly in London. Not seen him here, have you ? ’

‘ No,’ replied Durant. ‘ It’s many a long year since we set eyes on Gwynne. I’m glad to hear there’s a chance of doing so again. He’s been shaking the pagoda-tree a long while now, but I fancy that tree don’t shake down as it used to do.’

‘ No,’ retorted De Vitre ; ‘ your brethren out there have taken to what you denominate ventilating abuses, just as you and Slane do for us at home. Snug sinecures and the feathering of one’s nest generally are dragged to light, and held up to public opprobrium, much as they are in this country. I don’t mind you fellows now, because I have inherited money, and it don’t matter to me ; but there was a time I hated you all with a vengeance, as doubtless some of my less fortunate compatriots do still.’

‘ Ah,’ said Slane, meditatively, ‘ public-office men, I can fancy, don’t like us journalists. Odd if you did. You see, De Vitre,

you represent the felonious class, while we stand to you in the light of the detective police. You are always fostering abuses lucrative to yourselves, which we are perpetually dragging before the bar of public opinion. Your idea is to receive a sovereign for five shillings’ worth of labour ; our end is to see if we can’t get that crown’s worth of work done for half the money.’

‘I’ll argue with you no more,’ retorted De Vitre, as he lazily emitted a cloud of blue smoke from his lips. What have you been doing here lately? I haven’t been near the place for a month. Anybody said or heard anything funny?’

‘Well,’ chimed in Durant, ‘if you had been here twenty minutes sooner, you would have heard Egerton as a lecturer. He wasn’t bad, but I don’t think we can afford to let him take the hearth-rug again to-night. One burst from the Delphic oracle is as much as our minds can bear with safety at a time, eh, Slane?’

‘You’re an unbelieving lot, and I will preach to you no more,’ laughed the attacked.

‘How good of you!’ said Durant. ‘Best story we’ve had here of late is one Tom Dickenson, the actor, brought home. He’s been starring in the States, the last three years, you know?’

De Vitre nodded.

‘Well, on his way to San Francisco, Tom met a character. It was on the steamer that picks you up after you’ve crossed the Isthmus, and carries you on to the nugget metropolis. He was a regular Yankee, and of course soon made out who Tom was, and what was his vocation.

“‘Wa’al, Sir,” he said, “I hope you’ll du well; but they’re a rough lot, they air, the Californians. It ain’t often this child wants a nuss about with him, but he did on this identical passage about tew year ago.”

“‘How was that?’” asked Tom.

“‘Wa’al, I’m a peaceable man myself,

although I come from an 'all-fired kicking family. My father he once kicked a man from Bendemeer to Zion—not that that's quite as big a transaction as it seounds. They're tew villages down West that lie next each other, and it don't take such an ever-lasting peowful hyst to send a man across the beoundry when you ketches him handy. But he could kick, my father. They wouldn't let him play foot-ball at scheool cos that darned drop kick of his always landed the ball in the nearest pawnbroker's shop. Singular, warn't it? ”

“ “Well, it was curious,” said Dickenson, laughing.

‘The Yankee’s keen eyes twinkled with fun, but his features didn’t relax a bit.

“ “Wa’al, Sir, as I say, I was travelling reound this way, tew year ago, when I met aboard the steamer a full-sized digger. He was all that, and about 40 lbs. to spare, and the most cantankerous cuss ever I collided with. He didn’t care what he did, and had a habit

of smoking to windward of you ; so you got his smoke second-hand.

‘ “ Sais I to him one evening, ‘ My friend, if you ain’t a trifle more particklar where you blow that cabbage effluvia of yourn, there’ll be shocks to your constitution before long.’

‘ “ Cuss me, if in less than five minutes his smoke didn’t come right into my face again.

‘ “ ‘ Look here,’ sais I, ‘ I come of a kicking family, I du, and if you ain’t a leetle more careful what becomes of that smoke, there’ll be a hole made in the empyrean, by —— !’

‘ “ Wa’all, cuss his impudence, if he didn’t send another puff’ right across me.

‘ “ ‘ Stranger,’ sais I, solemnly, ‘ streaked lightning ain’t a circumstance to the way you’ll cleave the circumambient in about ten seconds. If you’d like to write to your wife, or put on a swimming-belt, you’d better be spry.’

‘ “ That darned digger, Sir, he only grinned.

‘ “ Jehoshaphat ! the blood flowed like lava threough my veins. My temples was fit to bust.

I couldn't speak, I was that wrathful. I just stooped to tighten my boot-lace, when the mean, ungrateful skunk, cuss me if he didn't"—

“What?” asked Dickenson, breathlessly.

“Wa'al, *kick me*,” drawled the Yankee, while his eyes twinkled with fun.

“Confound it, I never heard that before,” exclaimed Slane. “What do you mean by keeping it to yourself, eh, Jim?”

“Well, I told it now simply for De Vitre's benefit. I thought you were here the night Tom narrated it.”

“It's a very good kick off of Dickenson's, anyway,” laughed Ernest.

“He's improving; mark me, Jim, he'll attain connection with a comic periodical yet. I've observed fitful flashes of humour in him lately that almost qualify him for a place in the joke column.”

“Time to be off,” laughed De Vitre, “when you two combine to make me your target;” and he rose as he spoke.

‘Stop, thou horse-leech of the British Constitution,’ said Durant; ‘I’ll write a whole series of articles against the Fiddle and String Department, if you don’t wash that last hideous joke from out our ears by sparkling anecdote or account of startling incident in some shape.’

‘Bah!’ replied De Vitre; ‘you by profession are men of anecdote; I’m a man of figures.’

‘It’ll be a hot week for the department,’ observed Egerton Slane, abstractedly. ‘I shouldn’t wonder, Jim, if we find him wrong in one of his sums.’

‘Stop,’ cried De Vitre; ‘it’s not much of a story, and yet it was highly ludicrous at the time. I was staying in a country house, the other day, and amongst the guests was a man whose pet phrase for everything was the somewhat cuckoo-cry of “awfully jolly.” Whatever was mooted, whatever alluded to, he invariably chimed in with this dictum. It so happened that a *beau sabreur* of India

was narrating some of his experiences in that country, and, amongst other of his trials and tribulations, dwelt upon the dull monotony of frontier duty in those parts. "I assure you," he said, "upon one occasion I never met a lady for four years." He paused to give full weight to the dread announcement. The silence was broken by—"Awfully jolly!" and it was not till he heard the shrieks of laughter from the feminine part of the audience that the unhappy man became conscious of his hideous *faux pas*.'

'Come, we'll pass that, Jim, eh?' said Slane. 'Good night; you've ransomed the department for the 'present, and can go and sleep the sleep of the righteous.'

De Vitre nodded pleasantly in reply, and took his departure.

'Ha!' laughed Durant, "'English is an expressive language," quoth Mr. Pinto. Its range is limited. It consists, as far as I can observe, of four words—"nice," "jolly," "charming," and "bore."'

CHAPTER VII.

‘EXIGENCIES.’

IN the world addicted to modern idolatry, there is manifest a deadening of conscience which, to those not of that world, is sometimes startling. I don't know that it follows as of course that these worshippers at strange altars are altogether godless—that even, take them on the whole, they are worse citizens than their fellows who weep so over their backslidings. The Ritualist shocks the Low Churchman, although they profess the same creed. The devout Roman Catholic looks upon his Mohammedan fellow-man as doomed to perdition. There is much want of breadth and toleration in such views. Why should any of the numberless creeds that are scattered o'er the earth have the arrogance to say that they

only are in possession of the straight path to heaven? Better, I ween, the more tolerant belief taught us in our own text-book. ‘In my Father’s house there are many mansions,’ said the Master; and we malignant worms turn and spit at our fellow-worms, because they will not tread the same path as ourselves.

Toleration, toleration! with my last breath I will plead for the doctrine of toleration. ‘And the greatest of these is charity,’ saith the Scriptures, speaking of the virtues. Charity, in its highest sense, means toleration.

Ernest De Vitre sits musing in his snug apartments in May Fair, over a letter that the morning’s post has brought him. It is an application for relief from that nameless wretch whom we sometime back saw call on a similar errand in guise of a distressed clergyman—a miserable waif of humanity, past all approximation to happiness, except such as is procured through the medium of strong waters—an unfortunate, no longer

able to battle with the vice that possessed him, who craved but for oblivion of what he once had been. We saw him at his direst ; but these wretches have their moments of release from the devil that holds them in bondage. Anon, and again they partially recover the nerve and force of bygone days, displaying an energy and consistency of purpose we are little prepared for.

This man wrote to De Vitre, not now as a suppliant, but as one who claimed assistance as his right, in consideration of past services ; as one who participated in a secret ; as one who knew that his silence on past transactions was worth the buying.

‘My esteemed friend,’ muttered Ernest, with an evil sneer, after some musing over the letter, ‘I think you have a little mistaken your man. If you knew me better, I fancy you’d come to the conclusion that I’m not good to threaten, more especially on such trivial matters as you can bring against me. It will probably be hard times for you from

this out. Shirking attack has never been my system. Taking the bull by the horns generally entails dire discomfiture upon the bull, particularly when his horns are no longer nor sharper than yours, my worthy friend. What did Scotland-yard say about him, by the way?' and De Vitre rose and walked across to an *escritoire*, from which, after some slight search, he extracted a paper.

'Ah! this is it—"Madison: known to us for the last two years, though can hardly be designated of the criminal classes. Describes himself as a Dissenting minister; probably may have been at one time. Looked upon as an impostor who collects money ostensibly for charitable purposes. No convictions against him, though upon one occasion he had a narrow escape: cited at Marylebone, but the case broke down, legally, though morally pretty clear against him."'

'Odd that,' muttered De Vitre—"Probably may have been one." I wonder, now, why they should think so. I can quite

understand his assuming that *rôle* under the circumstances; but why the police should fancy that he has any legitimate grounds for so doing beats me. I suspect I know Mr. Madison's, as he pleaseth to call himself, history rather more accurately than my Scotland-yard friends do. Matthews, ex drawing-master, metamorphosed into Madison, Dissenting minister, with a taste for strong waters and imposture, is to be "understanded of the people." Matthews, as a minister of the Dissenting faith, I don't believe in. However, I'll see him myself—the best thing always to do with men of his type. Their nerve generally goes when collared.'

That afternoon saw De Vitre threading his way towards Tottenham-court Road, a not very savoury part of our great metropolis. He had got some way up the street before he commenced enquiries as to the whereabouts of Fleet Court. The slums of London were nothing new to him. At various times and

for various reasons he had penetrated them before. He had gone the rounds with the detectives in his time; had gazed with the eye of a philosopher on the stews of Shore-ditch, had contemplated the iniquities and ruffianism of Tiger Bay. Fleet Court, when he found it, appalled him in no wise. The weird gutter-children, all rags and filth, that contemplated the swell with open eyes; the draggled, slatternly women that, with dishevelled hair and lack, lustreless gaze, stared at him from the windows; the flavour of herrings, leather, cheese, and garbage that pervaded the wretched alley—all these he had encountered many times. Steadily he pursued his way until he arrived at number nineteen.

The ground-floor was a shop, dedicated to a mixed business in the way of garden-stuff, herrings, sprats, &c.—a permanent costermonger establishment—the Fortnum and Mason of those parts. The sprat, you see, takes the place of the bonbon in such neigh-

bourhoods; the salted herring represents the anchovy and caviar of the West-end. We are not all born to money, and luxury is fortunately fitted with a sliding scale. Salmon to the few, but the herring and sprat to the million; and may the million (God help them, poor things!) find them plentiful!

De Vitre entered, and tapped upon the counter, a proceeding which elicited much attention from a young gentleman of tender years, who had just succeeded in climbing into the window, with apparently some predatory designs upon the delicacies therein displayed.

A bold, slatternly woman speedily answered the summons.

‘What may you be pleased to want, Sir?’ she enquired, wiping her hands upon her apron. But ere De Vitre could reply, the small marauder in the window caught her eye. ‘Drat the little devil! if he ain’t at the bull’s-eyes again,’ she exclaimed; and

seizing the luckless delinquent by the scruff of the neck, she jerked him to the floor, administered a stinging box on each ear, and a vehement adjuration not to let her catch him at that game again.

When the howls of the offender had in some degree subsided, the woman once more turned to De Vitre.

'I am told,' replied the latter, in answer to her look of interrogation, 'that you have a Mr. Madison lodging here. Is that so?'

'Sometimes we have and sometimes we haven't. Maybe you'd say who you are, and I'll let him know you've called.'

'I want to see him at once, if he's in. Would you oblige me by seeing?'

'No, I won't, and that's flat. We don't care about strange visitors in these parts. We are bothered more than enough with missionaries, lady visitors, and such like, who give us good advice that we don't want, instead of firing, food and clothing, which we do. You don't look that sort, but I don't want

no one prying about my place ; and what's more,' continued the virago vehemently, 'I won't have it.'

'But, my good woman,' interposed De Vitre.

'Good woman,' shrieked the lady ; 'don't call me your good woman. I never did bear it, and I'm not agoing to begin now. I'm nobody's good woman but my husband's ; and he's a sweet article, he is, bless him, leaving me to work my fingers to the bone to keep a roof over our heads while he's swilling, and swiping, and swallowing, and snoozing.' And here the still further raising of the lady's voice, and the contemptuous glance she cast at the door leading into the room off the shop, clearly indicated that her husband was pursuing one of his customary avocations within at the moment.

De Vitre paused. It struck him at once that the irritable mistress of the house did not quite confine her own libations to water. How was he to get at this woman ?

Persuasion or force? When it came to make election between these two, there could be little doubt that a man of De Vitre’s temperament would choose the latter.

He struck his cane sharply on the counter. ‘Listen,’ he said, sternly; ‘I mean Madison no harm, but I intend to see him within an hour. There is a sovereign,’ and he held up the coin in his fingers, ‘if you bring me to him at once. If not, I’ll search the house before two hours are over, with the assistance of the police.’

De Vitre knew very well that there was nothing to justify his calling the police in; that they would be powerless to interfere if he did so. But he was well aware of the dread in which these visitations are held by such people as are dwellers in Fleet Court. Not the first time by many he had played the game of Brag successfully. Applied to those who live upon the boundary of the law, it is generally successful. The termagant landlady was conscious of unlicensed sale of

gin. Her thoughts flew to a surreptitious kilderkin of that article in the back kitchen ; moreover, the gold coin, a form of specie seldom seen in Fleet Court, glittered before her eyes.

It was in much subdued tones that she replied, 'I'm not afraid of the police; they've nothing against me or mine. There's no one can say but we're honest folks, nor get such living as we do anyway but on the square. Still, a sovereign's a deal of money to poor people like us, and if so be you'll give me your word you don't mean no harm to poor Mr. Madison, which his only fault is drinking more than's good for him, I'll see about it.'

'I mean him no harm,' replied De Vitre. 'There, you'll show me his room, I see,' and he threw the sovereign carelessly on the counter.

'I didn't say he was here,' said the woman hesitatingly, as her fingers clutched the coin.

'No, but of course he is. Be quick, woman.'

‘You’ve nothing again him?’ she enquired, eyeing him keenly.

‘No, I tell you once more. He wrote to me, and I’ve come to see him in consequence.’

‘Step this way, then, sir;’ and the virago, completely softened by omnipotent gold, led Ernest through the back room, and showed the way up a steep and narrow staircase.

‘That’s his door,’ she said, when they came to the top. ‘You’ve nothing to do but knock and go in.’

De Vitre tapped sharply at the door indicated.

‘Come in. What, ho ! Mother Beezlebub. Why disturb you a gentleman at his studies in this unseemly fashion? Dost want my opinion of a fresh brand of the elixir? Mr. De Vitre !’ he ejaculated with astonishment, as Ernest entered the apartment.

‘Yes,’ returned the latter, quietly. ‘You wrote to me, you know. I have thought it best to answer that letter in person.’

‘Most courteous and considerate,’ returned the other as, attired in a greasy duffle dressing-gown and slippers he surveyed his visitor. ‘If our reception-room is not quite what we could wish, there have been manifest improvements of late. The window curtains, not damask, we will own, but they give an air of comfort to the chamber. Take a chair, sir; pray take a chair. No, not that if you please, it is deficient in a hind leg. Exigencies, exigencies; as a man of the world you understand exigencies. The boiling of my kettle but yester morn necessitated that piece of amputation. Yes, that will do. I believe that chair to be still sound; but then again, exigencies, exigencies, they will arise,’ and the speaker gazed dreamily into the empty grate.

De Vitre had seen much of men, and that in manifold phases. He was not so much taken aback by Madison’s change of mood as another might have been. The broken wretch that had come to him in Mayfair was now evidently partially under the influence of his god.

‘You wrote me a letter?’ he observed, at last.

‘Ah, yes,’ said the other, starting; ‘I remember. I was collecting my little rents. Things are not quite with us upon the footing that we would like, Mr. De Vitre. If you will observe that table, sir, you will see that it is troubled with the rickets. My dinner service’—and here he threw open a cupboard, disclosing two plates, a cracked mug, and a stemless wine glass—‘is also much reduced. Yes, it grieved me to trouble you, sir, but we must live. I trust you have brought your little contribution.’

‘And upon what grounds do you dare apply to me in this fashion?’ asked De Vitre, sternly.

‘Exigencies, exigencies, my dear sir. I saw you had hardly mastered the question of exigencies. I must live; exactly. I see you deny my first proposition. Shall I put it, I intend to live? Good. To carry out that to me desirable object I require money.

Under those circumstances I levy toll. Now don't interrupt me, pray. I beg your pardon, but that chair creaks ominously; it will give way if you are not careful. Why do I levy a rate upon you? Because, my dear friend, I have a hold upon you; because, if you don't give the pittance I ask, I shall publish a little story to your disadvantage to the world you live in. Experience of human nature tells me that men will always pay for the suppression of an ugly story.'

'You a little mistake me, my good friend. Such historiette as you have got against me you might publish all over London, and I should care little. But I'd most assuredly crush you, my good Madison, for your cursed presumption in daring to talk about me at all.'

'Ha! ha! he forgets our old friendship. This is his gratitude for being true to him at one of the most important crises of his life. Dear, dear, Mr. De Vitre, how you overlook the exigencies.'

'Look here, Sir. Whether you're drunk or

shamming the fool to suit your own ends, you know best. But, mark me! I’ll not give you a shilling. If you should venture to apply to me in this fashion again, I’ll have you up for attempted extortion.’

‘How he talks,’ said Mr. Madison, addressing an imaginary audience. ‘So terse, so stern, so cutting. He’d require no counsel. It would go dead against me in any court in the kingdom. You’re a great man, Mr. De Vitre. I think I see it all now. The judge asking whether I have anything to urge why sentence should not be passed upon me. I look hopelessly at you. Your face is fixed and immovable. Not a hope for me anywhere. In despair I shriek “My lord, my lord, I abetted him in a felony, surely that gives me some claim to assistance at his hands.”’

‘What the devil do you mean?’ cried De Vitre, starting to his feet.

‘My dear Sir, exigencies. Pray be careful with the furniture. I was only picturing what might occur if you should really commit the imbecility you talked of.’

‘Very good. You will probably have that opportunity. If you have the pull over me you pretend to have, show it me. I pay well when I buy up such things. Till you show me cause to the contrary, I shall treat you as I would any other begging impostor.’

‘Dear, dear, he’s a hard man,’ observed Madison, smiling genially at that imaginary audience. A dour mon, as the Scotch say. Not the man, I should say, ever to give in on any point. Sorry, Mr. De Vitre, our interview has not been satisfactory. Can I offer you anything? If you would oblige me with a florin, the elixer vitæ is to be procured below at a moment’s notice.’

Though rather puzzled, De Vitre put down all Madison’s threats as simply the braggadocio of his fever-heated brain. Declining the latter’s hospitable invitation, he rose and made his way to the door. There he paused.

‘And pray, do you intend to attempt to exercise this apocryphal hold you have over me again?’

‘ I can’t say, I can’t say ; it all depends on the exigencies.’

‘ Psha, idiot,’ exclaimed De Vitre; and as he descended the stairs he could hear his host once more addressing the imaginary audience.

‘ A clever man, a hard man, a shrewd man ; he, he, he ! but he don’t believe in the exigencies ; he don’t comprehend what constitutes a felony ; he, he ! Ha ! ha !

“ Since laws were made for every degree,
To curb vice in others as well as in me,
I wonder we ha’nt better company
Upon Tyburn tree.”’

And with this mad strain ringing in his ears, De Vitre found himself once more in the street. ‘ Mad, to a certain extent, no doubt, poor devil,’ was his summary, as he strolled leisurely westwards.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘ASCOT.’

‘In vain the sage with retrospective eye
Would from th’ apparent what conclude the why ;
Infer the motive from the deed, and show
That what we chanced, was what we meant to do.’

YES, our motives may be all very well, but then see what sometimes comes of them. I may be laughed at, but I nevertheless shall ever contend that there are few places that more exhibit character than a race-course. You may study it with regard to the people there assembled. You may study it, confining yourself entirely to the horses; and those who have made horse-racing their pastime, if possessed of intelligence, can draw a very fair analogy between the men and the quadrupeds.

There’s your two-year-old, ‘handsome as paint,’ as the saying goes, and nervous as a *débutante* at her first drawing-room; there’s the grim hero of a score of cup tussles, reminding one of a veteran political leader; the evergreen handicap horse, occasionally returned winner of a good stake, like some City speculators; the ever lightly-weighted steed, always expected to do a ‘good thing,’ like many compatriots that I wot of, and disappointing his friends year after year much after the manner of his human prototype; the dogged stout stayer, that gets home a winner at last from sheer pluck and resolution; the handsome impostor that swerves across the course when he has the race in hand, like many a man who, with the ball at his foot, lacks energy to kick it. Then take ourselves—*place aux dames*. There are those who come for the fun of the thing—not many of these; those who come to be seen; those who come to flirt; those who come to gamble. In these times where-

in woman asserts and claims an equality with man, it would be absurd to deny her the right of losing money after our own fashion ; at all events she does and will do so. Ladies in the present day are more enlightened than to be satisfied with taking the odds in gloves.

Gold ! yes, gold we must have ! we want so many things in these times that gold must be come by in some fashion. The turf is quicker, and quite as safe and legitimate, as the Stock Exchange.

Wander through the carriages and watch the faces. Mark that fair woman in gorgeous toilette, as she leans from the top of a drag to speak to that good-looking moustached man who is standing on the wheel. How she smiles on him ; a *tendresse* between those two, you think. Bah ! he is telling her that he has backed Jeremy Diddler for her for the Hunt Cup, and he thinks him certain to win. The bell rings. A hundred voices proclaim they're off. Never mind the race ;

watch those two faces. How her cheeks flush and her eyes glitter (she looks to that race for the payment of a milliner who has forgot her manners and waxed clamorous); her mouth hardens as she sees Jeremy Diddler show unmistakable signs of distress opposite the drag, and die away to nothing immediately afterwards. She turns to her companion, who drops his race-glass with an angry light in his eyes.

'Beat again,' she exclaims, with a weary sigh and a slight quiver of the mouth.

He smothers a savage expletive, and smooths his face. 'Yes, out of luck,' he replies, with an easy smile. 'Jeremy cut up an arrant brute. I must go and see what's doing; I shall be back directly;' and he makes his way moodily across the course. He also had visions of gold, replaced just now by the grim shadows of outstanding bills—shadows that wax shorter daily, and proclaim them approaching the meridian.

It is Ascot—gay, maddening, intoxicating

Ascot—where we look to recover the sums lost, or to dissipate the sums won at Epsom, as the case may be. The race-course of Royalty, flirting, lunching, and gambling; pleasantest pandemonium, to my mind, in the United Kingdom. What matter your losings? Nobody can feel *triste* at Ascot if they eschew the last day. Then if your account is wofully to the bad, I am ready to admit the scarcity of the drags and the absence of the gay throng will give rise to Saturday's reflections before their time, as, plunging deeper into the mire on every race, you wonder where the sinews of war are to be come by for Monday's settlement. As a Sybarite, I would say, have none of it. Mistrust alway the certainties of an Ascot Friday. Let us lose, if we must, midst mirth and laughter, not amid the funereal bake-meats that attend the last hours of the meeting.

A glorious June evening! the moon shines brightly, and lights up those snug villas and

pleasant gardens that lie around the Ascot race-course. Windows are wide open, and the temporary denizens of these summer mansions lounge about the lawns, much enjoying the beauty and stillness of the night after the hot, feverish, dusty, crowded race-course.

What an elysium do calm and coolness constitute after such reckless pleasuring!

A couple pace backwards and forwards on that moonlit strip of gravel. The lady tall, dark, and richly dressed: a cashmere shawl thrown carelessly over her shoulders; a cigarette gleaming between her lips.

'You'd a bad day, then, Alberic, on the whole,' remarked Pauline St. Leger.

'Yes,' returned the Guardsman, as he pulled hard at his cigar; 'it was not to be called good. I got a turn over that handicap affair to wind up with, but I'm over a monkey out.'

‘And why didn’t you come and tell me all about it, eh, sir?’

‘Hadn’t time; I was only told just before the race myself. I’d been so awfully out of luck all through, that I’d only pluck to take eight fifties about it. Of course I put you down for your usual tenner; so, like myself, you get something back out of the fire.’

‘It was very good of you, Alberic, not to forget your unfortunate fellow-sufferer;’ and Pauline’s dark eyes flashed up in her companion’s face in a way calculated to turn the heads of most men. ‘Ah well,’ she continued, ‘we must hope for better times to-morrow.’

‘Of course,’ replied her companion. ‘Nobody’s ever frightened at a bad start. We’ve plenty of racing yet to win our money back upon, and put up a balance to the good besides.’

‘I’ve no faith in my star, somehow,’ returned Pauline, as she threw her cigarette away. ‘I’m great in presentiments, and

always feel intuitively when a race-meeting is going to be kind to me.’

‘Don’t be absurd,’ laughed Sir Alberic ; ‘we shall win money enough yet to content Elise, or whoever your *modiste* may be, and induce her to find dresses for Goodwood.’

‘I’m sure I hope so, or else I shall not be able to shine there. What a bore it is—the want of money.’

‘Ah yes!’ and the Baronet smoked on meditatively. He was inheritor of some eight thousand a year; but had already, young as he was, lived fast enough to know what it was to be run hard for the where-withal to carry on his careless reckless life.

‘Never mind,’ he said at length; ‘you must needs let me be your banker for a time, if it comes to the worst.’

‘You foolish boy,’ returned the lady, ‘as if that could be. Give me a light; I must have another cigarette; nothing soothes me so much when hipped;’ and placing one between her lips, Pauline half snatched her com-

panion's cigar from his mouth. 'It won't light,' she continued; 'you must draw yours up a bit;' and as she lifted her face to illumine the cigarette at the cabana once more restored to his lips, her eyes gazed up into his with all the subtle coquetry and allurements of an Aspasia.

His face flushed, and the cigar fell from his teeth, as he bent over her till his lips nearly touched her cheek.

'Don't be foolish, Alberic,' she exclaimed, drawing back; 'do recollect where we are. You've dropped it. Have you not got your light-box with you?'

'Yes, yes,' he muttered confusedly. 'You try one hard, Pauline.'

'No I don't,' she replied softly; 'but it is so hard to teach you men common sense.'

Certain it was that there were few school-mistresses better qualified to develope that valuable attribute than the Honourable Mrs. St. Leger; but her lessons were apt to be costly, and her pupils wont to wish that

they had arrived at such knowledge previously to falling into her hands.

'Come, good people! come!' cried the clear voice of Lady Trillamere, 'you've had enough of sentimentalising and moaning in corners over the day's disasters; come inside, and let us have some cards. It is getting chilly, and you men know we license you to smoke.'

From a garden seat where they had been the last half hour came De Vitre and Lady Mallandaine, in obedience to the gay challenge of their leader.

'I don't like losing, Mr. De Vitre,' said Cecile, pettishly. 'It isn't the actual money, but I hate to be beat. We women, you know, none of us can stand that. I must and will have my revenge to-morrow.'

'Certainly. At all events, lady fair, we will continue the war. Meanwhile, Lady Trillamere is challenging us all again to baccarat, and if you only hold the cards

you did last night, you may have your revenge at once.'

'Ah yes, that will be charming. Mind, you must bank with me again. I don't understand the game well enough to get on without your assistance.'

'Only too happy,' replied De Vitre, as he handed Cecile through the French window.

Baccarat is a pretty game enough if you have capital and coolness—one of those games that offers much facility for gambling; a diversion such as suited that pleasant party exactly; not requiring over much attention, nor the decorous sobriety of whist, but allowing flirting, conversation, and laughter. It was late before they broke up.

'Heavens, Cecile! what lucky star were you born under? You are invincible. You've won nearly all the money at the table,' exclaimed Pauline, as she rose from her chair, and took the candle Sir Alberic handed to her.

'Yes,' laughed Lady Mallandaine, 'Mr. De Vitre and I have about ruined you all ;' and as she spoke, Cecile was busy sweeping the pile of gold and silver that laid before her 'into her pocket-hankerchief. 'Bearing off my plunder, Lady Trillamere,' she cried triumphantly. 'See what an example I shall make of the ring to-morrow.'

'*Viva!*' returned that sporting peeress—as reckless a gambler as ever the sun looked down upon. 'You're in such form we shall all have to follow you. Good night. Stop! mind, Cecile, you dream us the winner of the cup.'

'Never fear, I'm going to look down a vista of good luck; to dream dreams; to see visions. The Sibylline prophetess will be nothing to me to-morrow. Good night, Mr. De Vitre.'

Another glorious day, although perhaps the dust is a little troublesome. The top of the Grand Stand is a sea of heads. Opposite to it the drags, breaks, barouches, landaus, &c.

cluster thick as bees in hiving time. You may walk for a quarter of a mile on the tops of carriages, through a boundless sea of luncheons if you will only wait for the proper moment. I have only to add, it is the Cup Day, and, as everyone knows, all Ascot lunches immediately after that race. The royal enclosure looks like a flower-garden, and for once, at all events, we admit the cultivation of dress beats the cultivation of nature hollow. Gorgeous silks and satins trail in lengthened folds along the short burnt-up dusty turf. The denizens of the Iron Stand muster strong, and the restless ring surges tumultuously at its foot, ravenous for food as the hungry ocean when the Storm King is abroad, and its insatiable maw agape for lives and argosies. Yes, and lives and fortunes too perish miserably year by year within that iron palisaded parallelogram which is dedicated to the warriors of the pencil. *Væ victis!* Woe to the backers of horses! Where are those who betted so

boldly and so madly some few years ago? Echo answers ‘Where?’ Nought left but to sing their requiems. The Jockey Club Stand even gives some slight signs of animation, and it is terrible *mauvais ton* to be guilty of emotion in those sacred precincts.

The royal *cortège*, preceded by its outriders in scarlet and gold, and headed by the Master of the Buck Hounds, comes slowly up the centre of the course—part of the Cup Day programme. Loud cheers greet the heir to the throne and his princess as they turn off into the enclosure, and the carriages drop their several occupants at the entrance of the Royal Stand. Then rings out the bell for saddling. Do any of those frolic gamblers detect the knell it peals? *Dum vivimus vivamus!* While we race we must wager, and is not racing part of the British constitution?—constitution of late days much sort to be interfered with in that respect as in some others. The legislators of our country deem, apparently, that it behoves them to take much

care of the poorer amongst us on this point, although delicacy forbids that they should interfere with a gentleman's vices. Heaven forfend! Are birth and money to count for nothing in these days of civilisation? and do they not at least command the right to tread one's own path to the devil?

Lady Trillamere's party are mustered in the royal enclosure.

Ah! if I had but imagination!—if I had but knowledge of the mysteries of silks, ribbons and laces!—then would I describe a trio of the most gorgeous toilettes that ever dazzled the eyes of man or made envious the heart of woman. But these are mystic things unknown to our coarse male understandings. We bow down, worship, and admire, as we do before a great picture, but we cannot describe the details that go to produce such marvellous effects. I must leave those costumes to the imagination, after the manner of Apelles, as when to depict the countenance of Ulysses proving beyond his art,

'The foiled painter buried—despairing to gain a
Good likeness—his face in a printed Bandana.'

Either those Sibylline visions have not been vouchsafed to Cecile, or neither she nor the rest of her party have paid much attention to them. The minor races that preceded the cup have been productive of nothing but disaster to them all. Sir Alberic glances nervously over his betting-book, and Pauline St. Leger feels aghast when she thinks how her liabilities are mounting up. Even pretty Lady Trillamere, most dashing and daring of *beaux joueurs*, begins to knit her brow and ponder whether she dare go on or not. A well-dowered widow she, and responsible to no one but herself for her misdoings and multitudinous naughtinesses.

'Awful luck, Lady Mallandaine,' said De Vitre; 'we've hardly won a bet the whole meeting. Our success at baccarat is winning at sugar-plums, compared with the way we are losing here. I can usually hold my own, too, on a race-course.'

‘What are we to do?’ enquired Cecile, rather anxiously. ‘I have lost ever so much more than I can afford.’

‘It may be bad advice, but I should make one more attempt to recover on the Cup, I think. At all events, that’s what I mean to do myself. Ah! here comes Lady Trillamere.’

‘Cecile, my dear,’ said her ladyship, laughing—it took much to make Lady Trillamere serious—‘we shall have to bring sackcloth and ashes into fashion. Bare feet and ungloved hands I intend to make the *mode* the moment we return to London. Racing we will vote vulgar. It must be, when it treats ladies of distinction like you and me in this fashion.’

‘What are you going to do on the Cup?’ laughed Cecile, completely reassured by her friend’s banter. ‘I hate giving in.’

‘Give in!’ cried the volatile peeress. ‘No, not yet. I’ll lose all Sarrington Manor first, and then turn a *sœur de charité*. The costume,

a little modified, wouldn’t be unbecoming. Eh, Mr. De Vitre?’

‘Not when donned by Lady Trillamere. It’s very hard to make some women look amiss in any garments.’

‘That’s rather nice of you, Ernest. You don’t often take the trouble, but you can make a pretty speech now and then.’

‘You don’t often vouchsafe me such fair opening,’ laughed De Vitre.

‘No, *mon ami*. You understand us rather too well. We don’t waste time on such as you;’ and there was a mocking laugh on Lady Trillamere’s lips as she spoke.

Cecile was by no means astonished at this badinage. The fast school educate their neophytes quickly, and though a year ago she might have listened to it with some surprise, it did not discompose her now.

‘Now, Ernest,’ said the peeress, ‘never mind any more compliments. I can’t quite make up my mind whether to back Queen of

the Air or the General this time. Which is it to be ? ’

‘ The latter,’ if you take my advice. ‘ It is what I intend to do myself.’

‘ The General be it ; and of course it’s wrong, and I hate gambling ; ’ and here her ladyship’s eyes were dancing with fun. ‘ But I am so deep in the mire that it must be neck or nothing.’

‘ Fifty?’ enquired De Vitre, curtly.

‘ No ; the whole hundred, I think,’ replied the peeress, demurely. ‘ It’s no use backing it for less.’

‘ And will you have another venture, Lady Mallandaine?’ enquired De Vitre. ‘ I really am sanguine about this.’

‘ Yes,’ cried Cecile ; ‘ like Lady Trillamere, I’m going to nail my colours to the mast for one more fight. I can’t afford as much as that, though.’

‘ A pony,’ said De Vitre, in a low voice.

Cecile paused a moment, and then gave a little quick nod. She dropped her eyes and

fidgetted nervously with her parasol for a moment. This was a heavy stake for her. No ; she dare not risk so much. 'Mr. De Vitre!' she exclaimed; but Ernest was already far on his way to the betting-ring.

And now the gate opens, and the competitors for the Cup, in Indian file, walk round the enclosure. All eyes are riveted on that great slashing bay colt that—with one of England's finest horsemen, attired in the white and crimson sleeves, on his back—paces majestically round the circle.

'Isn't he a picture?' cried Pauline St.Leger, who really was a judge of a race-horse, with enthusiasm. 'I won't believe he can be beat. Well, Sir Alberic?'

'He's a very strong favourite,' replied the baronet, who had just returned from the betting-ring. 'I've gone neck or nothing both for myself and you. The horse looks wonderfully well.'

'Fit to run for his life. Come and help me up on that bench. I want to see this.'

The preliminary canters are over, and nothing, Mrs. St. Leger vows, went better than that grand bay colt with his long raking stride. With the exception of the ever-roaring, ever-seething element at the foot of the Iron Stand, still vociferous in offers to bet odds, the calm of hushed expectation has descended on the vast multitude. Everyone feels that the crack scene of the carnival is about to be played. Again the bell peals out, and hundreds of glasses are levelled at the crest of the hill, as hundreds of voices proclaim they're off. Past the stand they come striding; a wiry brown colt, but little thought off by the public, leading. The white and crimson sleeves lie off about fourth, but the horse is going magnificently. Down the hill the anxious glasses follow them, and still that wiry brown, that carries the scarlet jacket, leads the field. As they round the turn in the Swinley bottom, three out of the half-dozen are done with. 'Queen of the Air wins!' scream

some sanguine backers of the mare, as half way up the straight she creeps up to her horses. For a moment the famous Oaks winner looks dangerous, but as she reaches the ^AStand corner she dies away, and in the next half-dozen strides Grimshaw eases his mare and gives the thing up as hopeless. 'Crowland wins! Crowland wins easy!' roar the crowd; but opposite the betting-ring Fordham brings the grand bay colt with an electric rush. Custance sits down and rides his horse desperately; they run locked together, a stride or two from the winning-post and the General almost succeeded in getting his head in front; but Crowland, responding to every effort of his determined jockey, is not to be got rid of.

'The General's won!'—'He's not, for a pony; Crowland won!'—'It's a dead heat!'—'Nobody names the winner for ten!'—'Pooh! the General won by half a length!' Such are the cries that convulse the betting-ring. Meanwhile, the glasses of the Stand and

drags are riveted on the telegraph board. Up it goes, the mystic cypher, followed by the numbers, affixed respectively to the General and Crowland on the card, and a thousand throats ejaculate ‘Dead heat!’ Yes, the Ascot Cup of 18— had resulted in a dead heat.

‘Oh dear, oh dear!’ cried ever *riante* Lady Trillamere, ‘this is more embarrassing than ever. What are we to do now? Pauline, my love, isn’t this awkward?’

But Mrs. St. Leger responded somewhat moodily, ‘The General ought to have won. Fordham didn’t come soon enough. I won’t hedge a shilling.’

‘Good, *ma belle*,’ replied the peeress. ‘I do like pluck. I shall follow your example. We’ll see what comes of it.’

Cecile caught the infection, and promptly declared that she also would abide by her original outlay.

It was in vain that Jack Tottenham—wariest of turfites, and cunning of fence in

the fell lore of backing and laying against horses—who formed one of their party, recommended them to hedge, and expressed his firm conviction that the deciding heat would go against them.

‘Away with you, Captain Tottenham,’ cried Lady Trillamere; ‘we are no cravens, and intend to abide by the white and crimson sleeves.’

‘You’ll repent, believe me,’ he replied. ‘I am going to put all my own money on Crowland. Mrs. St. Leger is quite right; The General ought to have won. He didn’t because he is not thoroughly game. He won’t be so near next time.’

‘Bird of ill omen, away,’ laughed Pauline. ‘Wait till the result confirms my verdict.’

Minor races are disposed of, and again the two cracks walk leisurely down the course to the starting-post, to decide which is the better horse. They are off almost before the crowd realise the fact. As before, the brown leads past the Stand by at least three lengths.

Down the hill and round the turn in the bottom the glasses follow them. Up the straight they come, Crowland still holding a commanding lead, while Fordham on the General lies off, sitting motionless. At the Stand corner he calls upon his horse to go up. The General lays his ears back, swerves right across the course, and Crowland gallops in a winner by a dozen lengths; the General having declined to make the ghost of an effort when asked by his jockey.

‘I am ruined, Alberic,’ murmurs Mrs. St. Leger.

‘It will have to be very coarse sackcloth, Cecile,’ said Lady Trillamere. ‘There must be no tampering with the economies now, my dear. Do go and look after the carriages, Sir Alberic. I hate Ascot, and should like nothing better than to have the General for a brougham horse. I should feel it my duty to be always driving about till he died.’

That gay Ascot party rolled home to their

pleasant villa in somewhat sombre mood. We none of us like losing, but to two of the occupants of those carriages reflection on their losses waxed oppressive. Yet none were in gayer mood than Pauline St. Leger and Lady Mallandaine at that night's dinner. They had agreed mutually beforehand that the disasters of the day should be ignored for the present.

'No use bemoaning our fate now, Cecile. Time enough to think what we are to do when we get back to London,' said Pauline, after a lengthened conference in Lady Mallandaine's dressing-room on their return.

And to that resolution they adhered rigidly.

CHAPTER IX.

‘PAYING FOR PLEASURE.’

THE philosophers tell us that the mind of man can be summed up under two heads—selfishness and sympathy. To become a past master of the great London world that dedicates itself to idolatry, you must eliminate the latter in great measure. Some people fall into the mistake of doing so altogether; they are generally failures. You cannot get on in society without small change, whatever stakes you may be playing for, any more than you can in life. Not to have it about you is a mistake the which there is no rectifying. Some people put in circulation spurious coin of their own mintage—an error still worse than the being found destitute. Of all pieces of Britannia metal ever

attempted to be imposed on this world, none is so unsuccessful as that of brain sympathy. Better not sympathise with your fellow-creatures at all than do so from that purely intellectual view of its being right that you should. If you have no heart—in short, if you have eliminated sympathy—don’t fall into the error of pretending to have one. It imposes on no one, not even on those you would fain benefit. Trust rather to the brain you have cultivated at the sacrifice of your nature’s best instincts.

The disciples of this creed are many. They seek to stifle all the best attributes of their nature, to nourish all the cynicism and unbelief in mankind that they can grow. And yet, thanks to men not being born so radically bad as represented, they fail signally in the attempt. These worldly-minded cynics, when they feel tolerably sure of not being found out, are apt to break down most consumedly, and do deeds of charity for

which their more orthodox brethren would give them little credit.

Cecile is back in London again, with leisure to think over that wild Ascot revel. Already this apple of pleasure at which Eve's daughters so love to nibble smacks bitter in her mouth. Had she enjoyed that reckless, feverish week? And in the depth of her heart Lady Mallandaine is fain to answer No. She lives with this wild set, and would fain be of them, but it is not in her.

Cecile sits at her solitary breakfast-table, lost in thought. A letter, written on foreign paper, lies upon her lap. She is thinking over that letter a good deal. It is from Wyndham Gwynne, and he tells her in it that he will be home almost immediately. She is musing deeply over that cousin who swore to be to her as a brother by her mother's death-bed; that cousin who has been absent for so many years in India now, but with whom she has always kept up a desultory correspondence; who has often

laughingly called her his little sister, and more than once reminded her that she was to apply to him if ever she should be in trouble.

“ ‘Oh that he were in London now,’ she thought, ‘and I would tell him everything. How I am to get this money I don’t know. I dare not ask Hervey for it after what he said the other day; and he didn’t like my going to Ascot, either. I wish he had locked me up.’ And Cecile made a little *moue* as she picked up her cousin’s letter and once more read it over.

‘I shall hardly know you, Cecile,’ it ran; ‘such a transformation! The school-girl I left has become a fine lady; the child I used to pet will now patronise me. You will be good to me, Cecile, won’t you, in memory of auld lang syne? I met a man, just come out, the other day, who described you as one of the reigning queens of the London world; that world I once knew so well, but to which I have been so many years a stranger.

Ah! well, it broke me, and it took many years' weary work to shake off the fetters I forged for myself in those pleasant times. You mentioned Ernest De Vitre in your last letter. He was one of my intimates in those days; remember me to him. It will seem very strange, and I daresay sad, looking in on the old life again. Very like a kaleidoscope, that London world, ever changing; and the bits of coloured glass with which I used to spin round have, I doubt not, either gone down in, or withdrawn from, the whirlpool. This is the last letter you will receive from me. Don't answer it. The next news I have of you I mean to take from your own fair lips. Till then, adieu.

‘Ever, dear Cecile, yours,

‘WYNDHAM GWYNNE.’

‘What am I to do?’ she thought again. ‘How am I to get this money? I shall have to raise it on my jewels, I suppose. I don't know how to set about it, but I daresay

Pauline can put me in the way of it. I don't like it; I am so afraid that Hervey might find it out. Bertie, Bertie, my darling! if you had but lived, this never would have happened to me.' And the tears welled into Cecile's eyes as she thought of her lost child—honest tears for him, poor boy, and not elicited one bit by the scrape she had got into.

But the door is thrown open, Mrs. St. Leger sweeps into the room, and Lady Mallandaine dashes away the tears and welcomes her friend.

'Well, my dear,' said that lady, as she threw herself into a chair, 'we made a pretty mess of our trip. Ruined past redemption—the whole of us. I don't much mind that; I'm used to it. Chronic insolvency is my usual state, but I don't see for the life of me how I am to compass Goodwood.'

'Goodwood?' retorted Cecile; 'I only wish I could see how to compass Ascot!'

'Ascot?' said Mrs. St. Leger, as she opened

wide her grand dark eyes ; ‘ why, we’ve done it, and I rather wish we hadn’t.’

‘ Ah ! Pauline, but I’ve a terrible lot of money to pay yet, and so have you. What do you mean to do ?’

‘ Well, my dear, I’ve borrowed the money. Can’t you do the same ?’

‘ I must, and you can put me in the way of it, I daresay. I can’t ask Hervey ; but some one would let me have money on my jewels, no doubt ; only I don’t know how to go about it.’

‘ *Très-facile, ma mignonne*. Talk to Ernest De Vitre about it, and he will arrange all that for you,’ replied Pauline. ‘ Is he coming to lunch to-day ?’

‘ Yes, I think so. I don’t quite like asking him to do that, though.’

‘ Very likely not. Borrowing money, Cecile, is always attended with unpleasantness. But my dear, if you don’t like to ask Sir Hervey for it, I don’t see what else you can do. To think,’ continued Pauline, medi-

tatively, ‘that such a grand-looking horse could be such a thorough coward. I’ve seen it in men, too,’ she murmured, abstractedly. Great physique is not always to be relied on when the pinch comes.’

‘Then you think Mr. De Vitre could manage this for me?’ enquired Cecile.

‘I don’t think anything at all about it; I know he can. Ernest is an old friend of mine recollect, and in the days when I had jewels to pledge he has often helped me in this wise.’

‘In the days when you had jewels? why you’ve lots now, Pauline.’

‘I’ve some; you can’t part with everything, you know. They are as much a part of one’s dress as silks and satins, but I’ve little left beyond the essentials. There’s a set of emeralds I could weep over now, but I never expect to see them again as mine own. It was when Maccaroni won the Derby, and I indulged in an unfortunate love for Lord Clifden. Dear me,’ said Pauline,

laughing, 'I've lost those emeralds many times since, in the vain hope of recovering them.'

But luncheon is announced, and the ladies have but just taken their seats, when De Vitre is ushered into the dining-room.

'I thought I would just look in, Lady Mallandaine, to see how you had borne the fatigues of the Ascot whirlwind. Killing two birds with one stone, finding you here, Pauline. I think I may safely congratulate you both on looking none the worse for our last week's festivity.'

'Never mind our looks, Ernest,' laughed Pauline. 'We know they are never to be found fault with; but do think of our feelings. You are lunching with a couple of paupers—is'nt it so, Cecile?'

'Yes, indeed; and as you have come, Mr. De Vitre, to see us in our tribulation, in the first place, give the paupers some chicken,' exclaimed Lady Mallandaine. 'When they have had that, and a glass of wine, they may

be able to talk to you. At present we feel the victims of circumstances, and with very little to say for ourselves.’

That luncheon passed over gaily enough, considering that two of the party, at all events, had difficulties to face that rather appalled them. But when they rose, Mrs. St. Leger declined to go up to the drawing-room again.

‘No ; I must go, I’ve lots of calls to make ; besides, you two have your Ascot account to make up. You gambled in concert, I know, all the week. Good-bye.’

De Vitre followed his hostess up stairs.

‘Will you go in and sit down?’ said Cecile, as they reached the drawing-room ; ‘I shall be back in two minutes, and I want to talk to you.’ Ernest obeyed. He had not long to wait ere Lady Mallandaine glided back with a couple of morocco cases in her hand, which she placed upon the table.

‘Now we will talk business,’ she said, as she dropped into a low lounging-chair.

‘What an unlucky week it was for all of us.’

‘Yes; we’d what is usually denominated a roughish time. Better luck at Goodwood, perhaps.’

‘You will have a lot of money to pay for me,’ said Cecile, nervously, and—and I must ask you to help me to procure it.’

‘Does she mean bills, jewellery, or what?’ thought De Vitre. He was almost as much habituated to see the women of his set in difficulties as the men, and had often been honoured with such confidences.

‘You may command me in any way, Lady Mallandaine. Only let me know what the difficulty is, and I make but very little doubt I can smooth it over for you.’

‘Well, the fact is, Mr. De Vitre,’ said Cecile, with rather flushed cheeks, ‘I haven’t this money, and I don’t like to ask my husband for it.’

‘Exactly,’ said Ernest; ‘you want to raise it. Nothing can be more simple.’

'Oh! thank you, thank you so much,' cried Cecile, 'if you will manage it for me. See, I have brought down these diamonds and that set of pearls;' and as she spoke she rose and handed him the cases. 'They will let me have what I want on those, will they not?'

'The diamonds alone would far more than suffice. But, my dear Lady Mallandaine, this is altogether unnecessary. Pray allow me to be your banker for the present; you can repay me at your own convenience. Nay, don't interrupt me. When I want my own, or you wish me to have it again, these diamonds will always enable you to borrow that sum. For the present, I beg you will think no more about it.'

'It seems I am ever destined to receive benefits at your hands, Mr. De Vitre,' replied Cecile, in rather unsteady tones, as her thoughts reverted to that first great service he had rendered her.'

'You make much of very little,' he replied

in a low voice. ‘Should it ever happen you really do want my assistance, you may rely upon it. And now I must say good-bye.’

‘Ah, it’s rather you make little of much,’ said Cecile, as she rose and extended her hand. ‘Good-bye, and, believe me, I’m not ungrateful.’

Cecile took a turn or two up and down her pretty drawing-room as she mused over the events of the morning. ‘Yes,’ she thought, ‘he’s very kind and nice ; I shall miss him dreadfully when we go down to Childerley. Heigho ! how dull Childerley will seem, to be sure !’

Cecile Mallandaine was, as yet, in no wise in love with De Vitre ; but she felt very grateful to him, liked his society, and was gradually beginning to rely upon him in all difficulties ; from which mingled feelings there have been brewed some very bitter cups, I ween !

CHAPTER X.

‘MR. BUTTERS ON THE FAIR SEX.’

WHAT all this time were De Vitre's feelings? He was as madly in love with Lady Mallandaine as it is possible for a man of his type to be. He prosecuted his passion as steadily as if it had been a praiseworthy and virtuous attachment. He never recked what might come of it. It deterred him not the least that his constant devotion might probably occasion scandal, that Cecile's fair name might be smirched in consequence of his attentions. No man knew better the scandalous world in which he moved. Few had a greater contempt for it. All he cared about at present was to be constantly in Cecile's society, to bask in the light of her eyes, to listen to the music of her voice, the soft

melody of her laughter. He craved the power of playing upon this bright spirit, of making it respond to his slightest touch, by wailing or joyousness. To his selfish, Sybarite nature, it signified little that the world might speak with bitter tongue of this woman whom in his way he loved. ‘Bah!’ he would say, ‘in my set we’re all talked about more or less. They talk about us in the aggregate, and then they pull us to pieces one at a time. What does it matter? If you only treat society with sufficient contempt, it is certain to cringe to you at last. While it is telling, with bated breath, how you were suspected of murdering your grandfather, boldly admit a general predilection for murders, and darkly insinuate that there are many gaps in your family.’

So De Vitre, careless of consequences, either to himself or to the woman he professed to love, continued the even tenor of his way. And as yet the world had not waxed scandalous concerning his intimacy

with Lady Mallandaine. He was looked upon as rather a licensed offender in his own circle, in this respect ; wont to have *tendresses* where he should not, and be habitually discreet in such *liaisons*. Moreover, he had more than once shown terrible powers of retaliation. Such power is always at the command of a sarcastic man of the world, who has made it his business to know the *chroniques scandaleuses* of the last twenty years or so of the London world. Old Lady Tearantwist—who dedicated her life to the demolition of characters ; whose tongue was bitter as gall, whose lips were acrid as vinegar ; a spiteful, acidulated woman, cunning of fence, and unscrupulous as a Sioux Indian on the war path—had never forgotten a sharp passage with Ernest De Vitre. The good lady had had her *affaires* in her day, and now deemed them condoned by time, and buried. But her adversary, when assaulted, had unearthed an old story to her disadvantage, and told it before her

face with an easy smile, and an affectation of entire ignorance that she was the heroine thereof. Her ladyship had from that out been careful as to what she related concerning Mr. De Vitre.

To Roland Dance, also, Ascot had brought nothing but misery. He would go. He told himself he was a fool beforehand. He found himself perfectly right upon that point. He was always cursing himself for his infatuation about Mrs. St. Leger. It was madness loving her, and he knew that she played with him as a cat does with a mouse. Fifty times had he vowed to break with her; but a flash of Pauline's eyes, a few soft speeches, and he was more irredeemably her slave than ever. He saw her but for a few minutes at Ascot, and then she was devoting herself to a desperate flirtation with Sir Alberic Hungerford. It may be easily imagined that those sunny days were all clouded as far as he was concerned.

God help you, my brethren, when you are

under the thrall of a woman of this sort. Cool, contemptuous, and merciless, she will eat your very heart out. It has been so since the world began. We do not seem to get wiser, nor do such sirens wax more pitiful. In this veracious history we have got so many people at present afflicted with this plaguey and rather unfashionable complaint of love, that the present chapter resolves itself into something like going round the ward of a hospital. We are, in short, visiting these votaries of Eros suffering for the most part from burning their incense in wrong places, and adoration at false altars; such misplaced worship has been cumulative of misfortune from time immemorial. We must visit one more patient, and then we will have done with them so far as to leave them to work out their own destinies in their own way.

Mr. Butters has not seen Suzanne now for some days. Since he enunciated his opinion that she was ‘a serpent,’ he has kept clear of the lady’s maid. Smoking his pipe medi-

tatively, he has arrived at the conclusion that women are all serpents, and everlastingly upsetting the natural course of events.

‘You can’t trust ’em,’ he muttered; ‘there’s no knowing where to have ’em or what tricks they’ll be up to. Look at the Oaks, bless you. You may train one and try one good enough to win six lengths. Well, you brings her to Epsom; puts on your money. Wot’s she do? runs last, likely as not. It’s their main perversity, that’s wot it is. They won’t try when you want ’em. They’re always kicking or jibbing or some other unpleasantness.’

Mr. Butters, it must be borne in mind, always placed horse-flesh and humanity in the same category, with some slight misgivings as to whether he was not rather hard upon the equine race in so doing.

Still smoking on, Butters becomes lost in admiration of the straightforwardness of men and colts as compared with the fickleness of women and fillies.

‘When he says a thing he means it, and when a horse is asked to do a thing, as a rule he tries; but as for the other sex, one can’t make out wot they means or wot they’ll do. All we knows is, they’ll never do wot they ought, still less if they happens to think it’s wot we wants ’em to do. Serpents! yes; that’s wot they are, and no mistake. With all my experience in training, how I could be such a turnip-head as to think I could break one in for home use, caps me. She’s a good-looking ’un, too; but break! bless you!’ and here the smoker snapped his fingers. ‘No; she’s a serpent, that’s wot she is;’ and Mr. Butters looked round his little room over the mews in which Alec Merriott’s horses were stabled, as if he defied contradiction.

Seeing that he was the sole denizen of that apartment, of course there could be no one to differ with him; and that in itself, in his present mood, was quite enough to constitute a grievance to the worthy Joe. ‘If it was’nt for serpents,’ he muttered, ‘I

might be having a bit of snug supper somewhere or another now.' And then Mr. Butters conjured up in his mind's eye the very comfortable housekeeper's room of Mr. Remington's mansion; and as he did so, his bitterness against the fair sex increased. 'Yes,' he said, whiffing viciously at his pipe, 'they upsets everything, they does—they've been known to sap the morals of stable-boys, weaken the in, in—what d'ye call it?—aye, 'tegrity of jockeys afore now. They're allays meddling, interfering, prying, or wanting to know. It 'won't do, Joe, my boy. You must continue to mix your own gruel till such times as you're past work. You ain't equal to it. No, I ain't, damme,' said Butters, as he gave vent to a volume of smoke. 'I'm too straightfor'ard to run in double harness, that's wot it is. I should have the *whole coach to pull*.'

Lost in the profundity of thought educed by this last reflection, Mr. Butters gazed

fixedly into the fire. ‘Well,’ he muttered at last, ‘it’s the same with all of us. The swells don’t come off a bit better nor we do. Look at the Captin’g—there he goes, pláy acting, writing books wot nobody reads, and generally making an exhibition of himself all round, and all because petticoats have turned his head. She’s a real lady, too, is Miss Remington; chucked me half a sovereign last time I held her horse’s head; and she can sit on a horse when she gets there, and that’s something. There’s a precious sight of ’em can’t; and know when an ’oss has had enough of it they seldom does. Leastways, that’s my experience.’

CHAPTER XI.

‘WYNDHAM GWYNNE.’

THE Anti-Lysistrata is in full blast—in all the glow of its somewhat cynical humour. There are clubs where you go to sleep, clubs where you go to dine, clubs where you go for scandal, clubs to smoke in, clubs for billiards, clubs for whist; clubs that, despite the intensity of their dreariness, fashion somehow compels men to belong to; clubs for skittles, denominated American bowls in these days; and there are clubs where you go to talk. The Anti-Lysistrata was of this last denomination. And they did talk, with more or less knowledge, on every conceivable subject.

Egerton Slane is there; he generally is; and prepared to differ with his fellow-men upon

any topic that it may seem good to them to introduce. He has not, upon this occasion, taken possession of the hearth-rug, but is enunciating his views vehemently from an easy chair.

Original sin forms the basis of the smoking-room converse upon this occasion.

‘I of course deny that hideous Calvinist doctrine,’ exclaimed Slane, ‘that we are all born inconceivably wicked; and that nothing but prayer, fasting, and the negation of all the natural passions, can save us. Still, you undoubtedly have the fact that there are men and women launched upon the earth with a predisposition for wrong, despite the best of education, culture, or moral training. The calendar of crime shows that only too clearly.’

‘What is your theory in such cases?’ enquired Durant, laughing.

‘My theory?’ replied Slane, as his eyes twinkled. ‘My theory is a fact—all my theories are, you know—undisciplined imagi-

nation. It takes the practical form with them instead of the theoretical. They commit their murders in reality, while I do mine on paper. Proper culture would have brought these poor people to writing three-volume novels instead of to the drop. Our system of education is too groovy. Suppression of the imaginative faculty is like throwing back the measles—dangerous to the patient.’

‘They ought to have had you on the School Board,’ grinned Mr. Durant.

‘They’ve perhaps done worse. The imagination is not cultivated half enough in these realistic days—reason perhaps why we have such a paucity of poets. But now I am going to give you a point on the other side.’

Nobody having contravened him, Egerton Slane felt it quite incumbent on him to change sides. He gloried in fierce argument; he detested an audience who did not quarrel with his wild theories, or rather the quaint paradoxes, he was wont to submit to his fellow-men. Opposition, the more strenuous

the better, was elixir of life to him ; he revelled in contradiction.

‘Women’s novels,’ he continued, ‘in these days, are strong confirmation of that old Calvinist doctrine that we are born desperately wicked. One can’t presume that these ladies, who relate us such charming and naughty stories, are giving us the results of their own experience. The faculty of imagining the life of the *demi-monde*, and the pleasures and pains of adultery, then, must be innate with them. But even that confirms my theory. They have taken it out on paper. Their imagination, fortunately for them, found vent in a theoretical shape.’

‘Does your imagination ever picture what these authoresses may be like, Egerton?’ enquired Trumble, the dramatic critic.

‘Eve first bit the apple, my son ; but Adam was on tenter-hooks till he got his own teeth into it. There’s not much difference between us, but they beat us in audacity ; and where the devil do they learn what they know?’

However, it's a very progressive age, and in a few years "*L'Affaire Clémenceau*" will be probably deemed a drawing-room book.'

'Well, yes; we are giving you a lift in our line. "Formosa" did something as regards education in that direction. The public, you see, can't be fetched by Shakespeare; but when, as Ruskin hath it, we light "the thorns under the pot of public sensuality," we get 'em directly.'

'It's a fact, Trumble. The nation seems craving for luxury and immorality—historical presage of the downfall of nationalities from time immemorial. Do you recollect Kingsley's famous apologue of the Trolls who, by twos and threes, looked into and witnessed the wealth and luxury of imperial Rome? How the news spread amongst the Trolls (or the outside barbarians); then came the avalanche, and the sack of Rome. There are hungry hordes a-foot at present who cast greedy eyes upon England's wealth, with small reverence for England's sword. He who

gathereth many diamonds and nuggets should be ready with the revolver, is a maxim of the gold fields.'

'Ah, we can't quite yet make up our mind how to put in the cartridge,' replied Durant; 'we're so desperately afraid of not having the best weapon.'

'Exactly, and shall come to our fists just as we have done away with the Prize Ring,' laughed Slane. 'Oh my country, my country, how very like you! Athelstane the Unready ought to have been a fixity in these realms—the only king that ever exactly suited us. Halloo! who the deuce is this?'

The enquiry was evoked by the entrance into the smoking-room of a tall good-looking bronzed and bearded man, in the prime of life. Now the Anti-Lysistrata was a small club, as, with a leaning to such heterodox tenets as I have before mentioned, it deserved to be. Consequently the members were at all events cognisant, as a rule, of each other personally. But it was the dress of the

new comer that attracted attention ; otherwise, even if unknown, he would have called forth little notice. Egerton Slane's eye had hardly marked his entrance save for that. But when a man appears in a London club smoking-room, attired in a seedy coat, half shooting jacket, half paletôt, with his brow surmounted by a fez cap, the eye-glasses, to speak metaphorically, of such civilised congregation are wont to be raised regarding him.

The new comer advanced listlessly across the room, took a cedar match from the mantel-piece, and ignited an enormous cheroot, then turned leisurely round, and with his back to the fire, and extended legs, proceeded to take stock of the room.

‘By gad,’ whispered Durant, ‘he has taken possession of the rostrum. Blessed if I don’t believe he is going to favour us with twenty minutes on the Eastern Question. Who the devil is he ? That’s the worst of a club like this, its members are so erratic ;

you never can tell where they are from last.’

But they were not destined to be long mystified, for the new comer, after looking the little coterie over for a minute or two, walked up to them, and exclaimed as he extended his hand—

‘ Egerton Slane, by Jove ! How are you ? Why, you’ve stood still ever since I last saw you, and don’t look a day older. How are you, Durant ? ’

The two gentlemen evoked rose and shook hands with he of the fez ; but the blankness of their faces showed that they failed to recognise their interlocutor.

‘ What ! you don’t recollect me, either of you ? ’

‘ Even so, Excellency,’ retorted Slane. ‘ Do you come from Central Africa ? Are you from amid the nomad tribes of Turkestan ? Was Jeddo your last location, or are you a Pacha with three tails direct from Bagdad ? ’

‘ And, O illustrious stranger ! ’ cried

Durant, 'would your mellifluous lips deign to whisper by which of your inferior titles you have condescended to be known to the denizens of this institution?'

'Confound your chaff. I have won money at whist from both of you, and smoked pounds of cigars in your society. You don't mean to say you don't recollect Wyndham Gwynne?'

'Wyndham Gwynne?' repeated Slane, as he gazed fixedly at the speaker. 'Yes, I see it now. Welcome home a thousand times. I give you my word I didn't know you from Adam. You've been abroad so long, and you've grown a beard, you see.'

'To say nothing of his disguise,' chimed in Durant, 'he looks like a bankrupt pacha. Very glad to welcome you back, Gwynne. You must forgive us not recognising you at first. But why

"So withered and so wild in thy attire?"

"Sailed in a steamer which it went ashore," as you were wont to say when you meant to

be funny in old times,’ replied Wyndham. ‘ Played “ The Overland Mail ” involuntarily on a coral reef in the Red Sea for forty-eight hours, and thought how much better I had seen it done at the Haymarket in days of yore. Lost all my kit. Was picked up by the next steamer, and arrived in town some three or four hours ago, with very little more wardrobe than I at present stand in.’

‘ Ah, you were wrecked in the Zephyr. I congratulate you,’ said Slane. ‘ You picked up incident, a thing I’m always wanting. You’ve disburthened yourself of the superfluities of life, a thing I never can accomplish (he never moved without two huge portmanteaus, a dressing-bag, and a hat-box). You’ve had an opportunity of studying human nature when pinched. That forty-eight hours must have evolved the weaknesses, meannesses, and heroic traits of your fellow-sufferers wonderfully.’

‘ Wish you had been there instead of me, Egerton,’ replied Gwynne, laughing. ‘ A

coral reef in the Red Sea, with a scanty allowance of sail-cloth wherewith to fence off a tropical sun, is not an eligible watering-place, in my estimation. I'm not going to spin you fellows a yarn about it. I've had to rough it much more scores of times. What struck me most was the pluck and gameness the women displayed. It was hard times for them, of course.'

'I can fancy that,' said Durant. 'You never know the best or worst of a woman till you have seen her in difficulties or tribulation.'

'You were not cast away upon a coral reef, that I know of, before your marriage,' observed Slane, drily; 'and yet, if you might be accused of a weakness, it is with regard to Mrs. Durant. Mind, I hold her quite excuse enough for it without a shipwreck, and if she had but a twin sister she should either say me nay or I would be a Benedict to-morrow.'

'I'm sorry for your sake she hasn't,' said

Durant, laughing; ‘but for all that, it was getting lost on Snowdon brought us together. No story, Egerton; it was a very commonplace adventure. We were caught in a fog about half way down, having got separated from our party, and had to sit still for some three or four hours till the guides found us. I had no idea of wooing her for a wife when we started on that excursion, although there was a mild flirtation between us, but it was all over with me when we reached our inn that evening.’

‘Moral,’ observed Egerton; ‘don’t go up mountains with young women. Durant came well out of it. But young women all the same must look a good deal alike in a fog, and you may not always hit off the right one.’

‘Ah well, I did. I must be off. Good night, Gwynne. We shall see you here often now, no doubt. Don’t forget Mrs. Durant expects you to dinner on Sunday, Egerton.’

‘Am I palsied in memory or oblivious of

pleasure? Go, wretched man, blessed with a wife all too good for you. Who would dare think that Mrs. Durant's invitations could be forgotten, save you.'

'Well, Egerton, what is going on in London?' enquired Gwynne, as Durant took his departure.

'Going on? Oh, scandal, calumny, bankruptcy, the theatres, the Divorce Court, and all the great institutions of a moral metropolis. The legislature has interfered solemnly to prevent people losing their money upon the turf just as nobody had any money left to lose, thereby developing the perfection of our laws; whereby it seems you may bet with impunity in Scotland, where they race but little, though not in England, where they do a great deal. It's much easier to get divorced than to be quite certain whether you are married or no. A few miles makes all the difference. To be quite clear on the point you should be married three times, North, South, and West. The rights of

women are looking up, and woman’s mission seems to be to put us all in our places. We are a progressive nation, Wyndham, and have^h got on considerably of late years. What we shall come to the next generation will see, but society strikes me as a little rotten, from high to low. When your upper classes are wedded to luxury, your middle to Mammon, and your lower to discontent, an upheaval generally follows. The iconoclastic period commences, and the overthrow of the old idols.’

‘Bah!’ returned Gwynne; ‘I ask you what’s going on in London, and you treat me to a sermon on the decadence of the age. Never mind drawing the horoscope of the next generation; tell me what’s doing in London this year.’

‘Ah, you want the scandal of the season. It’s impossible to keep a list of who’s broke, whether at the East End or the West, they collapse so rapidly in these days. We used to call spending two thousand a-year, when

your assets were only one, living well up to your income. That's nothing in these times. They live too quick, do the young ones of the age. Like the present race-horses, they can't stay; the pace kills them. Halloo! Alec Merriott, by Jove! How are you? Come and sit down. You know Wyndham Gwynne?

‘Of course, and charmed to see him once more amongst us, though he almost defies recognition with that beard,’ replied Merriott; and the two shook hands heartily.

‘Well, Alec,’ observed Slane, ‘the book was no go? I’d have given you a turn if I could; but you were weak, d——d weak.’

‘Don’t mention it, although I don’t think I’ve done so badly by it.’

‘Why what did you get for it?’ asked Slane, with astonishment.

‘A funeral oration from my publishers, the general ridicule of the public, and the bones of my unlucky story served up grilled by the press,’ replied Alec, tranquilly.

‘ Well, you are easily satisfied,’ said Slane, after a short silence.

‘ It will pay *me* yet, I hope ; never mind how.’

And for once in his life, at all events, Egerton Slane had nothing to say.

‘ You’ve had a long spell of India, Gwynne,’ remarked Merriott. ‘ Why I was a newly-joined cornet when you exchanged and left the old corps.’

‘ Ah ! you fellows, when you once get a pull at the pagoda tree, never can make up your minds to let it go again,’ said Slane. ‘ However, I’m off. Of course you remain in town till the very dregs of the season, Wyndham. You must, you know, if only to be reclaimed. You look, and I dare say are, just about two removes from primitive man at present. God bless me, to think what a little while the veneer of modern civilisation lasts.’

Merriott and Gwynne continued to smoke and gossip for the best part of an hour.

What with enquiries after his old comrades, and listening to the chit-chat of the then passing season, minutes flew rapidly for Wyndham. Merriott was a pretty fair authority concerning the London world, and his companion found that the news he had heard in India regarding Lady Mallandaine's position therein was correct.

CHAPTER XII.

‘ALEC CHANGES HIS TACTICS.’

‘AND so you want me to come up to Lord’s on Friday, Captain Merriott; and why, most noble captain?’

‘Well, it will be a good match. There will be lots of people, and the Brigade send a band in the afternoon. I want you to come and sympathise with my side.’

‘Haven’t you discovered that I am your evil genius? Don’t you know that I should only bring you bad luck? Whenever I have induced you to try anything, have you not always failed?’

‘Too true, Miss Remington,’ replied Alec, gravely; ‘but you should not reproach me. If I have failed, I have, at all events, striven to obey your behests.’

‘Yes,’ she replied, softly, ‘and don’t think but that I appreciate the effort. I know why you wrote that novel. But you will never be what I could wish you to be. Don’t deceive yourself. We shall never be more than friends.’

‘We shall be something more or not that,’ retorted Merriott, grimly.

‘Oh dear, you men!’ exclaimed Lia, ‘there’s no pleasing you. Ah,’ she continued, with a little grimace, ‘if you won’t have us as friends, what are we to do? We can’t be fond of you all, and we’re only allowed to marry one of you. There’s Mr. Babbington got quite angry the other day, because I wouldn’t ride with him.’

‘D—— I mean, confound Babbington.’

‘Captain Merriott, I’m ashamed of you. How dare you use such language? He’s a good old soul, Mr. Babbington. He’s not so old as Papa, you know, and oh, he has such lots of money.’

‘Don’t be foolish, Lia.’

‘Miss Remington, you mean. Seriously, you know I might do worse. It wouldn’t be rank, of course; but then it would be diamonds, carriages, and all the rest of it. It’s a thing to think upon—what shall I do?’

‘Confound—no, I beg pardon. Stop! I have it. Will you do what I ask?’

‘I don’t know; what is it? Let me hear.’

‘Well, you know you must marry a man of intellect, eh?’

Lia nodded.

‘Just tell Babbington he must write something amusing to prove his capacity in that way before you say Yes.’

A peal of laughter broke from Lia’s lips, and she clapped her hands at the suggestion.

‘Oh dear,’ she said at length, ‘how wicked of you to entrap me in this wise. I see my diamonds and carriages melting away in the dim perspective;’ and Miss Remington threw herself back in the lounging-chair she was seated in, and indulged in immoderate laughter.

The scene of the foregoing conversation is a drawing-room in Belgravia, into which we have peeped once or twice before. Lia and Alec Merriott are ensconced in one of the windows, while Mrs. Remington is busy writing at the davenport, near the other. I can't say Alec had ever felt very seriously uncomfortable about Mr. Babington's pretensions; still, in the world he lived in, he had seen some wondrous *coups-d'état* accomplished matrimonially by these high-priests of Mammon. The young lady of our time is a prudent and calculating damsel, and little apt to fall into her grandmother's 'love and cottage' delusions. Well, it is perhaps better so. Marriage in these days, based upon sheer trust in Providence, is a blunder, and examples are manifold in the land to show what comes of such improvident alliances.

'Mother, dear,' exclaimed Lia, 'Captain Merriott insists that you and I should come up to Lord's on Friday, to witness his

discomfiture in a cricket-match. Shall we go?’

‘Yes. I don’t think we have anything for that afternoon, and I’m sure, if Captain Merriott recommends it, we shall find it pleasant.’

‘Very good of you to say so, Mrs. Remington. There will be music, lots of people, and something to look at—I trust not our defeat; but Miss Remington, you know, is merciless where I am concerned. She won’t ever believe in me.’

‘She does so perhaps more than you think. She never wants you when you’re here, but I hear plenty about your misbehaving when you don’t come near us.’

‘Mother, mother, what nonsense you’re talking,’ exclaimed Lia, as the blood mantled in her cheeks.

Mrs. Remington was a good motherly soul, with, as has been before observed, a superstitious reverence for rank and fashion. Alec Merriott was a great favourite with her. He

certainly was not gifted with rank, but he mixed freely with all that fashionable mob whom the good lady held in such veneration. He was, as may be supposed, always on his very best behaviour, treating her with great deference, and ever willing to pour into her avid ears all the latest social scandal and anecdote.

‘Do you know,’ continued Lia, in a low tone, ‘that papa has been really pressing Mr. Babbington upon my consideration of late? I got quite into disgrace the other day on the subject, and was told not to be pert, but to think seriously over what was said to me.’

‘Why, what happened?’ enquired Alec, looking curiously at his companion.

‘Well, I suppose I ought not to have said so, but I couldn’t help it. Papa was chanting Mr. Babbington’s praises, and he wound up with that dreadful City slang, “He’s a warm man, recollect Lia.” “Oh yes, and shows it painfully at this time of year,” I replied. “He’s quite a Christmas lover, Papa, and ought to

come in with the skating ;”’ and here Miss Remington threw herself back in her chair, and burst into a fit of laughter.

‘Well,’ said Merriott, laughing, ‘I must be going. I count upon you on Friday.’

‘Yes ; but stop. I’m going over to see Cecile Mallandaine. Sit down and talk to Mamma for five minutes while I put on my bonnet, and then you can see me there.’

‘Captain Merriott,’ said Lia, when they found themselves in the street. ‘Do you know I’m very uneasy about Cecile?’

‘Why?’ asked the Lancer ; and he gazed down with undisguised astonishment upon his companion.

‘I don’t know, and that’s what annoys me more than anything. Haven’t you ever experienced the feeling that things are all going wrong, without being able at all to say how or why? Still you feel instinctively that it is so. Cecile Mallandaine has been to me as a sister, and I own I’m anxious about her. She’s grown so wild and reckless. I don’t

like all these new friends she's picked up of late. I don't much fancy Mr. De Vitre, and I'll own I hate that insolent Mrs. St. Leger.'

'They are neither of them much in my way,' replied Alec; 'and the lady, I fancy, don't like me. We had a passage of arms upon one occasion, and she is not of the kind to forget such things.'

'Why, what did you two quarrel about?' enquired Lia, and she looked curiously up into her companion's face.

'We didn't quarrel. We have both lived too long in the London world to commit such a *bêtise* as that; but she was exercising (pardon the slang) Roland Dance, who is fool enough to be terribly *épris* about her, rather sharply one night. I came to the rescue. You see I wanted Roland to come away with me. It was at Lady Monkton's ball, and Mrs. St. Leger was insisting Roland should remain to put her into her carriage.'

'And what did you say?'

'That as Sir Alberic Hungerford, her lord

chamberlain, was present, there could be no necessity for his waiting also. She favoured me with a glance of her black eyes that would have stretched me lifeless if such lightning was not providentially innocuous, and then told Roland, in her sweetest tones, that as he had come out with his keeper he had better attend to his behests and go home.’

‘Which of course he didn’t?’ observed Miss Remington.

‘Just so; and it was all I could do to stave off a quarrel with my best friend next day, in consequence. But Roland had some gleanings of common sense left him. In fact, I was an idiot to interfere; ought to have known better.’

‘I’m glad you don’t like Mrs. St. Leger,’ said Lia.

‘But still,’ continued Merriott, ‘I don’t see that much harm can come to Lady Mallandaine from knowing her.’

‘Of course you don’t. You must be a woman to foresee *that*, with all a woman’s

weaknesses and feelings. But Cecile, in her new line, is just the woman to be led into all sorts of scrapes by her associates. However, here we are. Knock for me, please, and I hope you'll win on Friday. Good bye.'

Alec Merriott walked slowly eastward in the direction of the clubs. He was musing a good deal over his own love affairs. In spite of Lia's declaration, even of that very morning, that they were never to be more than friends, I don't think he felt very despondent on the subject. The fruit that falls for shaking is apt to be over-ripe. Love worth winning is seldom won without due wooing. We can't, like the Patriarch, serve seven years in these times. Life is so short, and Rachel, even when faith is kept, loses her bloom somewhat in that period. The fires burn low, and, alas! at times go out. Long engagements are a weariness of the spirit, and are met, at times, on both sides more from a feeling of honour than aught else. They bring lines in the faces of both men and women,

sickness of heart, and other evils. Love is not the elixir of life, although it may be the champagne thereof. A matrimonial engagement, like a racing account, is best settled promptly.

Alec continued his way meditatively down Piccadilly. He felt pretty confident in the end that he should induce Lia to say Yes. What he was brooding over now was in what light Remington *père* would take it. His predilection for Babbington rather complicated the situation. It was not that Babbington himself was of much account, but Babbington personified money; and it was quite possible that Mr. Remington, a devout worshipper of Mammon, might look for wealth in a suitor for his daughter. Now Alec had inherited an estate by no means large, and one burdened, moreover, with considerable encumbrances. He was well off, but not at all a rich man. He was mentally mapping out a stormy interview with old Remington on the subject of set-

tlements, when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

‘All in the downs, Alec,’ exclaimed Roland Dance, as he slipped his arm beneath his friend’s. ‘Who’s gone dead? Has Lia Remington looked coldly on you? or have you a bill due next week, and no assets to meet it with? Most noble Festus, what’s the row?’

‘Nothing; I was only thinking.’

‘Good gracious! don’t do that. Nobody ever thinks during the season, not excepting our rulers even. They keep that for the autumn, and if they are troubled with consciences, mighty pleasant reflections they ought to have as they contemplate the everlasting mess they have made of late about most things they have set their hands to. Civilisation and progress are all a mistake, Alec. They lead apparently to a great increase in the price of kid gloves, cigars, and other essentials, and I for one am all for a retrograde movement. The wearing of

the original woad, and the mystical worship of Stonehenge, is, I feel, not without its attractions. Let's go back, only let us get back far enough, and pass over the miserable days of coaching, &c.'

‘You seem in great spirits, Ro?’

‘Do I? Well, that juvenile Spartan who history tells us put the fox under his cloak, I dare say presented a pleasant grin to his youthful associates. We won't talk about it, Alec, but Pauline drives me nearly mad. I know all you would say. I see it all as clearly as you do, but I can no more struggle against it than fly. It's my kismet, old fellow;’ and a dreary smile flickered about Dance's lips as he uttered the last words.

‘My dear Ro!’ ejaculated Merriott, with real sympathy in his tones.

‘Pooh! away with your commiseration. I'd scorn to make moan to any but you. I despise myself even now for what I've said; but when the thumb-screws bite hard,

we can't always stifle the cry that rises to our lips. Come along, and have some lunch somewhere.'

'Good. Let's strike across the Green Park here, and I will feed you at the Rag.'

CHAPTER XIII.

‘THE SKELETON IN THE HOUSE.’

CECILE is beginning to find that the paths trodden by those who would fain live their life in a concentrated form are by no means devoid of briars and rough places. You may concentrate a life just as much as you may concentrate a bullock. Liebig’s essence of beef has its antitype in existence, and it has been much the fashion of late years to live through the *ivresse* of the span allotted to us at once, and then sit ourselves down in sackcloth and ashes, to wait wearily, or penitently, as it may be, for the end.

If you mean cutting down the field, you must expect, at all events, to give long prices for your horses. If you mean to live with

a fast set in London, or indeed anywhere, you must make up your mind to spend your money freely. 'Life is all a question of six-and-eightpence,' said Theodore Hook, in one of his best novels, and the making a sovereign do duty for fifty shillings is the problem that perplexes us still in our generation.

Cecile, indeed, is musing most gloomily this fine morning over liabilities incurred and scarcity of ready money. Until this season she had never known what it was to have bills she was unable to pay, and to find her purse empty. But it was not till this year that she had elected to be of those who scoff at the ordinary canons of society. Bills might wait, and as yet were indeed by no means pressing ; but ready money? You are lost in London without loose cash. Men who have carried the great principle of credit to the extreme point of which it is susceptible, who have conscientiously ever refused to part with a stiver that they can possibly induce

anyone to book to them, have all had to acknowledge this.

‘One must pay cabs, confound ’em,’ I once heard a neophyte exclaim.

‘I don’t,’ retorted a past master. ‘Why the devil don’t you job a brougham? Its much pleasanter, and exonerates you from all the bore of ready money.’

But this was a stroke of art that would have stood Cecile in little stead. She had her carriage. Yet ready money is a necessity, in manifold ways, hard to particularise.

She was still brooding over her difficulties, when the butler threw open the door and presented her with a card.

‘Gentleman waiting, my lady, to see whether you are at home.’

She glanced at it, and her face flushed. ‘Oh yes, Reynolds. Show him up at once.’

In another minute Wyndham Gwynne entered the room.

‘Oh, Wyndham, I’m so glad to see you,’ exclaimed Cecile, as she advanced across the

room to meet him, and extended her hands. 'Such years and years you have been away ; and, although you wrote to tell me you were coming home, I never saw your arrival in the papers.'

'I only got to town the night before last, and was so busy all yesterday improvising a wardrobe, I had not time to come and see you. I was shipwrecked on the way home, and reached England destitute of clothes.'

'Never mind, I have got you home at last, and we shall keep you now for some time ; is it not so ?'

'Yes. I am home now for a good spell. It has been rather a weary sojourn out there all these years.'

'Of course. Do sit down, please. How could you be so long away ? You ought to have remembered you had an adopted sister to take care of.'

'I have never forgot that, Cecile, and never shall. But I hardly know you—you're so changed from the little girl I left.'

‘Do you think I’m improved?’ asked Lady Mallandaine, shyly.

‘Compliments to sisters are things unheard of, but the girl I left when I sailed for India has turned out a very pretty woman,’ replied Gwynne, laughing. ‘Surely that’s enough for you.’

‘Ah, I don’t want compliments from you, Wyndham. I want you to be what you promised my mother you would be to me.’

‘As I have often told you, Cecile, you need never be afraid I shall forget the trust I pledged your poor mother to perform,’ said Gwynne, gravely. ‘But you’ve established a husband since I left you.’

A shade fell over Lady Mallandaine’s fair face as she replied, ‘Yes, but one may want a brother too. Now Wyndham,’ she continued rapidly, ‘you must look upon this as your home in town. I shan’t ask you to stay with us, as that would probably not suit you, but you must lunch or dine here whenever the whim seizes you. While as for

Childerley, there, of course, your room will be always ready at your bidding.'

'Thanks, sister mine; that's just what I should like; license to run in and out here when the spirit moveth me, and a billet at Childerley as country head-quarters.'

'Yes. Well, that's settled. Hervey shall tell you the same himself when he sees you. You knew him well in the old times, and I know you're a favourite of his.'

'He'll be into lunch, I suppose?'

'Oh, I don't know,' returned Cecile, with a little hard laugh. 'Hervey and I are quite fashionable people, I assure you, and if we miss each other at dinner, don't sometimes meet for two or three days.'

Wyndham said nothing, but he felt sad at heart as her rejoinder fell on his ears. That little metallic laugh jarred upon him, too, as he recalled to mind the soft, low, rippling laughter that had been in her childhood one of his cousin's most notable attractions.

If you study character closely, laughter is

a very transparent page to follow. To begin with : even the stage admits the great difficulty of simulating it. Mrs. Jordan, Madame Vestris, Mrs. Nesbitt, and, I would add, Mrs. Stirling, have all been celebrated for that clear, ringing, joyous laugh that carried you away with it, although the actress was not as yet even in sight. But when you come to the simulated laugh of society ; bah ! my friend, if that imposes upon you, I see nothing to prevent your taking copper for gold through the world generally. And it is so especially true as regards women. Let me hear a woman’s natural laughter, let me know of what station in life she may be, and without even seeing her I should not make a very bad guess, I think, at her character. Men’s laughter, from its deeper and gruffer tone, is not quite so easy to follow. It is easier to pick up a tune from a piano than a violoncello.

‘Well, I knew you were embarked on fashion’s stream, Cecile, but I had no idea

you were so much in the flood-way as that,' said Wyndham, after a short pause.

‘Nonsense ; you wrote me word you had done it all years ago. You know one scarcely has a moment one can call one’s own in London. Hervey is busy at the House, and I—oh, I’m busy everywhere ;’ and once more Cecile laughed ; and again Wyndham noticed how the old melody was wanting. A musical laugh even yet ; but, to those who had known it a year back, slight discord in the tones was sufficiently obvious.

‘Poor little Bertie’s death must have been a sad blow to you, Cecile?’ observed Gwynne, gravely.

In an instant Lady Mallandaine’s face changed. A great awe came over it, as even yet in the presence of the majesty of death. The lines about her mouth hardened, and the colour left her lips.

‘Hush!’ she said, almost in a whisper, ‘you shouldn’t speak of it ; nobody does to

me, you know. The light of the world died out for me when my darling was taken ; I’ve never been the same since. Nobody loves me now except Lia, and I am not quite sure even about her. Did they tell you,’ she continued, with flashing eyes, ‘that it was I who killed him ; that the mother who bore him was revelling while he, poor child, was struggling for his life ; that the hand who should have bathed his poor fevered temples, and wiped the death-dew from his brows, was joining hands in the dance while he wrestled with his agony ? Ah ! no, I see they haven’t,’ she continued, as she gazed into her cousin’s horror-stricken face. ‘Wyndham !’ and rising as she spoke, she threw herself on her knees by his side, ‘they have been very good ; they know I killed him, but they won’t accuse me of it. My only hope is in you. I loved him better than my life, and yet, wretch that I am, I left him in his agony. He’s gone. Hush ! don’t speak ; I know I’m guilty ; but you

promised by my darling mother's death-bed to take care of me. You must now. I claim your promise to the dead!' she exclaimed, almost in a shriek, as she sprang once more to her feet. 'You know you said——;' and bursting into a paroxysm of hysterical weeping, Lady Mallandaine threw herself back into a chair, and sobbed passionately.

To say that Wyndham Gwynne was astounded is barely sufficient to express the state of his mind. He felt much as a man would who, intending to light a cigarette, had suddenly exploded a powder magazine. For an instant he remained motionless; then, springing to his feet, rang the bell sharply, and meeting the footman in the doorway, said curtly, 'Lady Mallandaine is unwell, send her maid here at once; at once, you understand. Quick! away with you.'

Cecile meanwhile continued to sob convulsively.

Utterly nonplussed as he was, still Wyndham bethought himself of the stereotyped remedies. Hurling a bouquet of roses and camellias into the grate, he drenched his handkerchief in the vase, and proceeded to bathe his cousin's brow and dash water into her face. While thus employed, to his great relief the door opened, and Cecile's maid and Sir Hervey entered the room.

‘What is it?’ exclaimed the baronet. ‘Ah! hysterical; she is often so. How are you, Gwynne? You had better get her to her room, Lucy. Perhaps, Gwynne, you would give Lady Mallandaine your arm;’ and, supported by her cousin and the lady's maid, Cecile left the room.

‘Come back here, I want to speak to you,’ said Sir Hervey, in a low whisper, to Wyndham.

The latter nodded assent; and as soon as he had escorted his cousin to her chamber, hastened to rejoin her husband.

‘How are you?’ exclaimed Sir Hervey, as

he cordially shook hands with him. 'I am glad to see you back on your own account, still more so from selfish motives of my own.'

'It's very good of you to say so, after what I've apparently done.'

'You need not explain,' interrupted the Baronet; 'I know already what has taken place between you. Of course you've alluded to poor Bertie's death. It is about that I wanted to speak to you before you left.' And then Sir Hervey sat down, and in very sombre manner recounted that domestic tragedy; made Wyndham acquainted with the morbid hallucination under which his cousin laboured regarding it, and how all measures, so far, had failed to dissipate that idea; how that professional advice had counselled no allusion to it, and had recommended trusting to time for oblivion.

'What the misery has been to me, Wyndham, I can't tell you; what it is still, is a cross heavy to bear. The taking of poor Bertie was a blow hard to submit to, but the

alienation it has wrought between Cecile and myself is a still ruder shock. I was fain to ask you to help her upstairs just now,’ he continued, with a wan smile; ‘she literally shudders at any attention from me at such times; and yet, God knows, I love her very dearly.’

Wyndham sat silent for some moments. He had pictured Cecile a gay, happy wife, and the disclosure of this grim skeleton on the hearth moved him much.

‘Sir Hervey,’ he said at length, ‘this has all come upon me like a thunder-clap. I can’t tell you how grieved I am for you both. It may not be much comfort to you, but I did once know of a somewhat analogous case in India, and that eventually came quite right; but it is only fair to tell you that the hallucination was the result of a severe fever, and the cure was wrought by a sharp shock to the nerves such as no medical man could for one instant recommend. In this case it was quite accidental.

The husband saved his wife from the fangs of a cobra, just as she had given herself up for lost. Her illusions were dispelled from that moment, and there is no happier couple living than they. Yet, poor fellow, he suffered two years of bitter anguish ; she too, perhaps, poor soul.'

Not much comfort in this little anecdote, and yet it threw sunshine into Sir Hervey's well-nigh despairing soul. He clutched at the idea at once. The shock was to come somehow—who could say how ? But it was a great point to have some man of whom he could make a confidant. A shy, proud, reserved man like Sir Hervey, had few friends to whom he could unbosom himself, and it is very doubtful if he would have done so with Wyndham Gwynne, but that accident had already half disclosed the skeleton of the house to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

‘DE VITRE’S LUNCHEON PARTY.’

ERNEST DE VITRE sits at his desk at the Fiddle and String Department, in far from a tranquil frame of mind. A good many things have combined to disturb his serenity this last week. The department has of late been target for the bitter practice of a newly-floated journal of democratic tendencies, and with surprisingly accurate information. In starting a new ‘weekly,’ or for the matter of that, a new ‘daily,’ the great thing is, if possible, to strike out a fresh vein—originality of some sort. ‘The Bird of Freedom’—cognomen of the afore-mentioned journal—had made known its election in this wise. ‘Our Public Offices : causes of their inefficiency, and testimony to the utter superfluity of some of them.’ De

Vitre had chuckled immensely over a pleasant article on the War Office, in which the writer, taking the superfluity view of the case, had suggested that, 'while you had no army there could be no necessity for that department.' Economy would be promoted by its disappearance; while that visionary force we dignified by the name of an army could be either disbanded—such of it as could be laid hands on—or employed as supernumeraries at Astley's and the patent theatres.

But De Vitre hardly appreciated the joke quite so much when he found the Fiddle and String Department the object of attack. He was quite aware of the rottenness of that institution. Such work as it had to do, since De Vitre had become second in authority there, was upon the whole well done; but it was one of those anomalous institutions of the past that simply provided for many young men of good family. It was not so much that it was inefficient as that it was superfluous. De Vitre knew all this. Still, however

we may secretly acknowledge the rottenness or the instability of an institution with which we are connected, we for the most part cling to it^{as} much as the ivy does to the tottering towers it has wooed and embraced so long. Though we may feel it is destined only too shortly to fall, though we know that we shall share in that collapse, we still adhere to it. Strange forces are afloat in these times, and it is hard to say what of old institutions and beliefs will hold their own against the democratic wave which is spreading so surely and gradually over Europe.

De Vitre, too, has been troubled again with a somewhat peremptory application for assistance from Mr. Matthews or Madison,

‘For fame

Sounds the heroic syllables both ways ;’

who is apparently more troubled with ‘exigencies’ than ever. De Vitre chafes fiercely under this. With all his contempt for the man of exigencies, he knows that he holds the key to a strange story in his life, the

telling of which would redound but little to his, De Vitre's, credit. And yet this man hints broadly at something more ; of having a hold upon him that he little recks of. What can he mean ? Is Madison merely practising upon his fears to extort money ? He don't want that old Lasterton escapade raked up, it is true. It is a scandal he would fain avoid ; but nevertheless legally it can hurt him not an iota.

‘ Getting time,’ he muttered with a grim smile, ‘ that I did away with my friend Matthews and his exigencies. He's become *exigeant*, and that I never bore from man nor woman. I must consult Scotland Yard, I think, about his case, and see if I can't manufacture a walking ticket for him—something that will take him into the country, to say the least of it, or perhaps relegate him to Portland or some other of our philanthropic institutions of that nature ;’ and here De Vitre rang his bell sharply.

‘ Be so good,’ he observed to the answering

clerk, ‘as to let Mr. Jenkinson know that I am going away in ten minutes ; and tell him to let me have anything of consequence at once!’

Apparently there was nothing of consequence. It was very seldom there was in the Fiddle and String Department, and this, in his present frame of mind, seemed almost an injury to De Vitre.

It was so horribly confirmatory of that confounded ‘Bird of Freedom’s’ view of the establishment. His ‘very well, sir,’ was tinged with bitterness as he dismissed the clerk who brought him Mr. Jenkinson’s assurance that the stability of the country would not be involved by his principal’s absenting himself.

Once away from his office and De Vitre’s brow rapidly cleared. He recollected that he had some pleasant people coming to lunch, as he walked westward. ‘No,’ he thought, glancing at his watch, ‘it’s far too late for the Park now. I’ll go straight home, and quietly await the advent of my guests.’

Not much quietude is there about Ernest De Vitre, though, upon this occasion. Reckless, selfish roué as he is, he has become involved as such men do at times with a passion wild as could be entertained by a boy in his teens, yet combined with all the fierce intensity of a man who is midway in his eighth lustre, and in whose veins the blood surges hotly. He paces the room impatiently as he thinks that the woman he worships is about to enter his house for the first time. His devotion has already begun to evoke comment in his own circle, and Cecile herself can but be aware of it in some measure. Women are quick in apprehension on such subjects, and are seldom wont to overlook the fact of the male creature having succumbed to their fascinations. It may suit them to ignore it or to encourage it, but ignorance on the point would be to assume a cultivation of what George Eliot calls ‘the faculty for ignorance,’ that lieth not in the nature of woman. Cecile is

of course conscious of De Vitre’s admiration, and, sooth to say, is a little perturbed of late on that subject. She rather likes it, but at the same time has no wish that it should become more *prononcé*. De Vitre has made himself a necessity to her. She likes him extremely, and would be much grieved that existing relations between them should be disturbed. Severance from him she feels would be to take the salt out of her life at present. But then she is equally aware that when man degenerates into a lover, women can seldom retain him as a friend. It is done, and has been done, but with men only of far more nobility of character than Ernest De Vitre could by any possibility lay claim to.

Dressed for the Park, Cecile gazes impatiently at the *pendule* on her drawing-room mantel-piece. Her carriage is at the door, and she only awaits Mrs. St. Leger to start for her morning drive. Mrs. St. Leger is not gifted with punctuality at the best of

times, but she is considerably past her appointment this morning.

The door opens and the butler hands a note to his mistress, a *chiffe* with elaborate monogram, and delicately scented.

‘From Mrs. St. Leger, my lady,’ said the official. ‘Her servant wants to know if there is an answer.’

Cecile tore the note open.

‘DEAR CECILE,’ it ran,

‘So sorry I can’t drive with you this morning as I promised, but unforeseen events forbid it. I will meet you at lunch at Ernest’s, and tell you my troubles. I fear I have kept you waiting.’

‘Ever yours,

‘PAULINE ST. LEGER.’

‘No answer, and the carriage,’ said Lady Mallandaine, as she perused it with an impatient gesture.

‘It’s at the door, my lady.’

So Cecile descended, and in a few minutes was whirled up to Hyde Park.

‘Such a nuisance,’ she muttered. ‘I detest driving in the morning, and I can’t get out and walk by myself. So stupid of Pauline not to let me know sooner. I wonder if I shall have the luck to pick up an escort of any kind; not much chance, I fear.’

But Providence was good to Cecile that morning; for at her second turn, just as her carriage was checked at the Albert Gate crossing, Alec Merriott lifted his hat to her. A slight gesture of her parasol, and Merriott had slipped through the rails and was making his salutation.

‘Captain Merriott,’ said Cecile as she shook hands, ‘unless you are encumbered with weighty engagements, I want you to take charge of me for a turn, I am so bored driving alone.’

‘Shall be only too happy,’ said Alec, as he opened the door and handed her out.

‘Where shall I tell him to wait? About the Corner, eh?’

‘Yes; that will do. I haven’t met you, that is to have a talk with you, for some time. Ah! why did you write that book? You who do most things well, why did you mistake your *métier* in such wise?’

‘Why did I do it? For the reason that, from time immemorial, men have committed incalculable folly. No need to tell you. You know.’

‘Well,’ replied Cecile, laughing, ‘I think I can guess. I didn’t like your story, but I don’t think it did you much harm with Lia. I am a *confidante* you know. What do you think?’

‘If I let you into a great secret you won’t betray me?’

‘On my honour, no.’

‘You won’t breathe a word to Lia?’

Cecile shook her head.

‘Then I’ll tell you. With the object I had in view, it has been almost a success.

Next to writing a very good novel, the best thing I could have done was to write a very bad one. Mediocrity, and I should have been only exhorted to try again, and you can’t conceive the toil and tribulation I went through over that first precious essay. Lia knows very well it was writ to please her, and she gives me some credit for that, and a good deal of pity for the scrape she led me into.’

‘I see,’ said Lady Mallandaine, laughing. ‘Such a casuist as you, Captain Merriott, need never despond. We women don’t betray each other’s secrets altogether, but I think you have friends in the garrison, and I sent you a message, after the theatricals last year, not to raise the siege.’

‘I know you did—a thousand thanks for it. I was very much in despair at that time. In fact, Lady Mallandaine,’ continued Alec, meditatively going back to first causes, ‘I think you are, to some extent, answerable for my literary effusion.’

‘No, no, no, Captain Merriott,’ replied Cecile, her eyes dancing with mirth. ‘I’ll have nothing to do with your bantling. Lia’s its godmother, and she only. Don’t weaken your case by dragging my name into it.’

‘Faith, you’re right there. I don’t think I can afford to take an ounce of responsibility off Lia’s shoulders regarding it.’

‘Of course you can’t, and it would be all in furtherance of your real interests if I and many others of your friends were to cut you to-morrow, on account of the heinousness of your offence. Lia would have to champion you, and she only could do so effectively;’ and here Cecile paused, and burst out laughing.

‘Only could do so effectively how, Lady Mallandaine?’

‘Oh, I’m sure I don’t know any more than you do. But I suppose she would have to assent to whatever line of defence you might set up. Consult a lawyer, and see

what he says about it. If his opinion’s not mine, he’s not fit to be a lawyer.’

‘And you won’t tell me your opinion?’

‘No, because you know it, whatever you may pretend. But I’ll give you a title for your next book, and you will give birth to it, although you think you’ve written your first and last.’

‘And that is?’ asked Alec.

‘“Marriage Settlements,” Captain Merriott,’ replied Cecile, demurely. ‘And now please find my carriage and put me in it. It’s getting time to see about some luncheon. I’m not going to lunch at home, or else I would take you there and feed you. Oh, there’s the carriage. Thanks. Good-bye. I don’t mind,’ said Cecile, laughing, ‘if you do accuse me of being an accessory to the next book.’

A few minutes more, and Lady Mallandaine’s carriage pulled up in Curzon Street, May Fair. Cecile descended, and entered De Vitre’s luxurious bachelor establishment.

‘Good morning, Lady Mallandaine,’ said Ernest, as he welcomed her. ‘Either you have left the Park early or my other friends are laggards, for they have not put in an appearance as yet.’

‘Perhaps I’m a little early. Pauline was to have driven and come here with me, but something interfered with her as regards the drive. However, she wrote me word she would meet me at your house.’

‘Punctuality is not one of Mrs. St. Leger’s virtues; however, she will doubtless put in an appearance shortly.’

Mendacity this of the approved London pattern. He also had been favoured with a note from Pauline that morning, which he had received some twenty minutes before Lady Mallandaine’s arrival.

‘Dear Ernest,’ she said, ‘never mind the why; but I can’t show the light of my countenance at luncheon to-day. I have done all I can for you so as not to spoil

your party, and told Cecile (how wicked it is to tell such stories) that I shall meet her at your house. There, *mon ami*. You will have full opportunity to prosecute your flirtation without my support.

‘Did you ask anyone to amuse me? Doubtful, I fancy. I have known you forget these minor arrangements before, when strongly interested on your own account. You are very pleasant, but as utterly good for nothing as anyone I know. May your entertainment be successful.

‘Yours,

‘PAULINE ST. LEGER.’

Some twenty minutes passed by in desultory chit-chat, and then De Vitre observed gaily, ‘It’s nonsense waiting any longer. On their heads be it if their cutlets are cold. Everyone knows all London lunches at two; and half an hour’s grace is the extreme limit allowed. After that, we hold that the Row has evolved something more intensely

interesting—something that warrants the breaking of such paltry engagement. We'll lunch at once, Lady Mallandaine, without further regard for our *confrères*,' and Ernest rang the bell

To say that Cecile was perturbed about her position would be absurd. She had taken her degree in the fast school with which she now lived, although not a past master, or mistress, should I say, like Mrs. St. Leger. But still she felt the situation awkward. When she made this engagement she had never contemplated its resulting in a *tête-à-tête*. A professed admirer is so apt to turn into a lover on such occasions. Now this was precisely what Lady Mallandaine deprecated. She had no objection to De Vitre's homage and admiration, but she had not as yet forgot that she was a wife, and had no wish that things should proceed further; a mere neophyte, you see, after all, in this new sect of her adoption, the high-priestesses of which conceive that

appendage as quite part of society’s frame work.

It was awkward. She liked De Vitre; felt herself beholden to him to an immense extent. There was the never-to-be-forgotten service he had rendered at Twickenham. Even now she was heavily in his debt concerning Ascot. Uneasy in her mind was Cecile as she swept through the door De Vitre held open for her, and, ushered by his well-trained valet, gained the dining-room. But there was no need. Few were quicker at reading the signs of the times than Ernest De Vitre. He saw that Cecile was ill at ease; he knew that she was one of the newly-converted, and he had seen her blue eyes open more than once at Mrs. St. Leger’s doings or Lady Trillamere’s sayings. He was too much smitten to risk a rash move, and he felt intuitively that Lady Mallandaine, disturbed already about the awkwardness of her position, was doubly on her guard against insidious assault. Nothing could have been more

perfect than his manner. He conversed pleasantly and easily about all the current topics of the day ; gossipped over the scandal and chit-chat of their own circle ; in short, played the courteous host to perfection, with just that mixture of deference and *empressement* in his manner that women so dearly love.

Long before the somewhat elaborate lunch was over Cecile had become thoroughly at her ease, and it was with laughing lips she arose at last to depart.

‘I dare not do it again by myself, Mr. De Vitre, in these scandalous days we live in ; but as soon as I can ensure support and countenance, I shall invade you once more. See the penalty of giving so good a luncheon.’

‘Let it be no idle threat, Lady Mallandaine,’ replied De Vitre, as he escorted her to her carriage ; ‘make it a dinner next time, and we will have more strings to the bow than Mrs. St. Leger. Good-bye.’

Cecile bowed, and, ere the carriage was well in motion, had once more to bend her head in return to the salutation of a bronzed, bearded man, who raised his hat to her from the pavement.

‘I wonder who the deuce lives there?’ muttered Wyndham Gwynne, as he continued his way leisurely in the direction of Park Lane. He had seen Cecile get into her carriage as he approached, but had not recognised her till the carriage had passed him. Who it was that had handed her in he had no conception.

CHAPTER XV.

‘LORD’S CRICKET GROUND.’

SOMEWHAT jaded by the fierce racket of the London season ; somewhat bored by doing the everlasting Park ; sitting pensively over the *débris* of our lunch at the club to which we are affiliated ; what a relief it is when some member of our acquaintance comes across to our table and suggests, ‘ Come up to Lord’s ; there’s a big match on, and we’ll get a little country air.’

We brighten up. The afternoon that so bothered us to dispose of is now chalked out.

Lighting a cigar, we deposit ourselves in a hansom, and in a few moments are whirling up Regent Street, upon which the hot

summer sun strikes down with relentless severity. Not much crowded at this time of day, for the West End is as yet lingering over its lunch, while the workers of the big city are still tied by their accustomed avocations; across the Oxford Circus, past the huge Langham Hotel, and up Portland Place, with its sedate air of wealth and respectability; skirting the Regent's Park, where, with an unfavourable wind, we may be blest with a whiff of the lions and the other high-scented animals to which the Zoological Society give board and lodging. Now clattering amongst those coquettish little villas in which Barine and Lalage hold their naughty courts and spread their silken meshes; straight then along the St. John's Wood Road, till we arrive at the entrance of the home of the Marylebone Club, and where the flag flying over the racket-court informs us that it is a match-day.

Passing through the narrow little passage, where you are mulcted of your sixpence—

money well laid out—you find yourself upon Lord's famous cricket-ground. On your immediate left a tavern ; on the right the racket-court, scene of many a dour and desperate battle. Some distance to your left is the pavilion, sacred to the members of the club, though thrown open by them to the players engaged in the immediate match of the day. Opposite the newly-erected grand stand confronts you, open to the general public upon payment. In the centre lies the green sward, brought as near as the skill of man can make it to the evenness of a billiard-table. Round the oval of the ground, stand, lounge, and sit the crowd of spectators ; behind them comes the ring of carriages—not many of them here as yet. Belgravia is hardly to be collected so early.

But it is one of the fashionable matches of the season, nevertheless. This day the Household Brigade are striving for victory with an eleven selected from the camp at Aldershot, and much interest is manifested

in the result. It is the second day of the match, and the first went grievously against the Guards. Their wickets fell apace ; their batsmen went down before Alec Merriott's straight shooters quickly as their representatives of seventeen years ago did on that grim Inkermann morning, only in this case providentially to rise again. When they proved impervious to the fast bowling of Merriott, they had succumbed to the slow, insinuating twisters of Mr. Trentham, of the Artillery ; slow, dribbling bowling, that invited you to let out at it, but which, when you did, somehow spun into the air if you hit it, or wound in serpentine fashion amid your stumps if you missed it. Aldershot had a strong lead at the end of the first day's play, and two to one was laid upon them by more than one astute judge.

But there is no game hardly in which there are so many fluctuations as cricket, and this morning the Brigade had made a surprising rally. Whether the ground had

changed, whether Alec Merriott's shooters were not so deadly straight as yesterday, whether Mr. Trentham had lost the length, and so made those slow, dangerous twisters innocuous, I can't say. It may be that the Brigade, under solemn vow, had dined like anchorites and retired early to bed, while their exulting adversaries had passed the night in wild, tumultuous revel. I know not. This fact remains: the bowling that beat them yesterday was of small account to the Guardsmen to-day. They cut Merriott for twos and threes in every direction, and as for him of the slow and serpentine projectile, they simply went in and hit him all over the ground.

Of course the bowling was changed, but that seemed to make little difference; the Brigade was well in and full of confidence, while the Aldershot team exhibited symptoms of demoralisation. However, all innings have a close—unless, perhaps, Mr. G. Grace's—and the Guards are out at last. But woeful

is the change in the aspect of the game. Yesterday, Aldershot was seventy-six runs to the good on the first innings; to-day, the Brigade have not only wiped off that deficit, but are sending the Camp in for 156 runs to win. Anybody's match say the talent, but good judges rather incline to the side that has made such a surprising rally.

The dinner-bell has gone some time ago; the hour is nearly up, and in a few minutes it behoveth Aldershot to essay whether they can mark up 156 runs before, or at the worst contrive to keep their wickets up until, the clock strikes seven.

With a cigar between his lips, at the lower corner of the pavilion lawn, might be seen Alec Merriott, in deep and mysterious conference with Trentham, that sinuous artilleryman, and Crashington, the hardest hitter of the Rifles. They are deep in consultation about the match, and as to what will be the most judicious order in which to put their men in.

‘We’re a good bit off beat, you know,’ said Trentham, who was captain of the eleven. ‘Unluckily for us, you see, the second innings they collared the bowling; now, as I have told you all along, that was our weak point. When Alec there and myself were used up, we’d so few changes to put on. Your three or four overs were a failure, Crashington.’

‘Of course they were. I always obey orders; but every one knows my mission is to punish loose bowling, not deliver it. A roving commission on the square leg is my place when out. Don’t look so jolly serious, Trentham, my boy; I’m going to put one or two on the top of the racket-court this afternoon.’

‘Well, Merriott,’ resumed the artilleryman, ‘I’ll send in Sloman and Blanton to begin with. The first is a safe man; he never gets runs, but he always stays the best part of an hour at the wicket; and Blanton is steady. You will come next, Stunner, eh? and you follow, Alec? and mind, we must lie down to

it. Confound a draw ; let's go for the runs ; there's plenty of time.'

'*Vive la guerre!*' cried the Stunner, as Crashington was generally denominated by his intimates. 'I like a death or victory game. No orders to play steady, thank heaven, but free license to go in and hit ; that's your sort.'

'I expect you to hit and run judg-matically all the same,' replied Trentham, laughing, as he went off in search of *les enfants perdus*, Messrs. Blandford and Slo-man.

'It'll be a good game to win, Merriott,' said Crashington ; 'and I feel like exercising the Brigade, all over. You gave 'em plenty to do last time, old man.'

'Not so bad ; only hope I shall succeed as well this time,' replied Alec.

He had put fifty-four runs to his name in the first innings, and Lia Remington not there to see. Could he do it again, that was the question. To be in love, as a rule, is

synonymous with being nervous when we would fain exhibit ourselves to the greatest advantage. Of course my astute young friends of this generation will pooh-pooh this statement immensely, and laugh at such old world theories. Well, they have a right to; and yet, methinks, as a good sceptical fielder, I would always for choice prefer to take odds about the gun at Hurlingham that is honoured with a lady marker. Cleopatra was the ruin of Antony; Madame de Maintenon was not conducive to Louis the Fourteenth's success when she accompanied him on the war path. Are we wiser now?

The game has begun again, and the Brigade are taking their turn in the field. Dull work at present for the spectators. Captain Sloman is a man with iron nerve, who blocks, and pokes, and smothers the bowling. Now and then a ball glances off his bat somewhere between point and slip, and he obtains an unexpected run; but he rarely hits at any-

thing, and is always a second or two behind time when he does. Slow bowling is more likely to prove destructive to him than fast; the first may run up his bat, while the latter occasionally runs off with fatal effect. Blanton is a neat bat, with great power of defence, and his orders are to play steady. Not much to be wondered at, that it is far from lively cricket to contemplate, under these circumstances.

The ground meanwhile is filling. Carriage after carriage glides noiselessly over the turf; the space between the pavilion and the grand stand is already occupied two or three rows deep, and the late arrivals have to content themselves with the ground just above and to the left of the tavern. *Les enfants perdus* still remain immoveable at the wicket; immoveable in every sense, for it is very seldom they change ends. Blanton occasionally makes a single prettily, but Sloman contributes nothing to the score.

‘Curse him,’ says Charlie Sylvester, ‘the

latest importation from Eton,' to the captain of the Brigade eleven, jerking his head as he speaks, to indicate the wily Sloman. 'I have hit him all over, but he's so well padded he don't mind. I'm going to bowl at his head next over, and we'll see what he thinks of that. I never saw such a bit of timber in front of a wicket before. He's what the sappers call a mantelet.'

'He is a sickener; but keep steady, young 'un; we shall catch him at last.'

Young Sylvester shrugged his shoulders, and indulged in a grimace; but the first ball of his next over would have probably taken the veteran Sloman between the eyes if he had not promptly ducked his head. I don't play cricket, but how careful I should be not to irritate a bowler if I did.

Not much life in the game at present; but such tedious defence is wont to wear down the bowling, and is very conducive to winning a match. But at last, waxing in confidence, Blanton lets out at a ball a little beyond his

reach, which, catching the edge of his bat, spins up into the air and drops into the hands of the vigilant slip. The telegraph board registers fifteen runs and one wicket down, although the pair have been in for five-and-thirty minutes. The Stunner succeeds, and with him a decided change in the aspect of the game. He leads off by sending Sylvester to square leg for two, and gives the Guardsmen generally no cause to complain of want of exercise. He has not, as yet, got one up to the racket-court, but the hard hitter of the Rifles is knocking the bowling about with relentless severity, while his *confrère*, the veteran Sloman, continues to block with steady pertinacity. A change in the bowling is greeted by the Stunner with a straight-forward drive down to the pavilion for four, and the spirits of the Camp rise in consequence.

‘Good stroke, well played,’ exclaims Alec Merriott, from the step of Mrs. Remington’s carriage. ‘We shall win yet.’

‘Ah ! I hope so,’ ejaculates Lia ; who, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, is eagerly watching the game under Alec’s guidance. ‘I know so little about cricket, but thanks to your explanations, Captain Merriott, I begin to have a partial insight into it. Oh, look, she cried, clapping her hands as the hard-hitting Rifleman caught a slightly over-pitched ball at the half volley, and sent it away to leg, under the benches, and into the very midst of the carriages. Why don’t they run ?’

‘That counts four without any running. We allow four whenever the ball is hit into the crowd.’

‘And you go in next, you tell me ? What a good score you made yesterday. I do hope you will do the same to-day. I want to see you knock the balls all over the ground, as Captain Crashington is doing now. I so hope he won’t be out before you are in. I want to see you at the wickets together.’

‘Well, Miss Remington, I think he’s break-

ing the bowling for me, which will make matters easier. You know you said, a few days ago, that you were my evil genius,’ said Alec, laughing. ‘I hope to convince you to the contrary, this afternoon, for, in the slang of the cricket-field, I feel like run-getting.’

‘Ah! I trust I was wrong,’ said Lia, gently. ‘But look, they are throwing the ball up; that means somebody out, does it not?’

‘Yes! it’s Sloman; though I didn’t see how. But I must be off. Wish me luck, won’t you, Lia?’ he whispered.

‘Every luck,’ she replied in a low tone; and with that, and a saucy little nod to console him, Alec departed to arm for the fight.

In his ardour for defence the imperturbable Sloman had at last got his leg in front of the wicket, and been adjudicated ‘out.’ He had been in close upon an hour for eight runs, and returned moodily to the pavilion, protesting against the umpire’s decision.

I have said that life may be studied in

most of its phases on a race-course ; the same remark applies to a cricket-ground. Look at Sloman, the bore of the game, uninteresting, not to be got rid of, and finally retiring calumniating his extinguishers. Do not we all know his social prototype, borne with for years in his circle. A veritable Old Man of the Sea, alike feared and hated. At last comes the iconoclast, who refuses to believe in him, contradicts his pet theories, laughs at his beard, and holds him up to ridicule. He falls from our shoulders, and we despise ourselves that we have submitted so long to such an incubus. Relegated to the gutter from whence he sprang, does he not also bespatter his enemy with mud ? When you topple over one of Society's bugbears, my brethren, be assured that you will have need of the clothes-brush.

Having put on his guards and indian-rubber fingers, Alec walks leisurely across to his wicket. Trentham accompanies him for a short distance.

‘The Stunner is well in,’ he remarks, ‘and I hope to see you two make it hot for the Brigade for close upon the next hour. If you can keep together for something like that, the match should be safe for Alder-shot.’

‘All right, old fellow ; half a dozen balls just to get one’s eye well in, and then I trust to be as busy as the Stunner.’

Merriott looks to advantage as he places himself at the wicket. His tall, lithe, muscular figure, accords well with his flannel shirt and trowsers—the former cut very open at the throat, with a turn-down collar. A bright cherry-coloured neck-handkerchief, loosely knotted, and a straw hat bound with a ribbon of the same hue, complete his costume.

‘Play!’ calls the umpire ; and Alec plays a straight one easily back to the bowler. The second ball is pitched a little too far ; Alec draws back and cuts it beautifully, just off the bails between point and slip, for three.

The ball is now with the Stunner, and, as luck would have it, remains with him for the next ten or a dozen balls, during which the Rifleman hits hard and freely. They are both quick men between wickets, and runs accumulate rapidly.

Once more it is Alec's turn to bat. He drives one smartly forward, but the best field in the Brigade runs in to meet it, and it is back again in the bowler's hands quick as thought. The next he cuts sharply to point, but unfortunately cover point handles it at once, and again there is no chance for a run. The third ball is pitched well to leg; Alec lets go at it with a vengeance, but is the least thing late; twisting in, it grazes his right pad, and shoots off that into his wicket.

‘What confounded luck!’ ejaculated Trentham, as he witnessed the catastrophe from the pavilion.

But there were other tongues besides Trentham's that commented on the fall of

Merriott's wicket, and by no means with such just discrimination. Miss Remington had been wound up to a great pitch of excitement about this match. Alec's first brilliant hit had made her still more sanguine, and she stamped her foot with vexation when she saw his wicket go down.

Warm-hearted, generous, and impulsive, Miss Remington is also gifted with a quick temper. Filled with wrath at her disappointment, she disperses sharp cutting replies to the dangles round the carriage. She feels it more bitterly because she will not acknowledge to herself that she really cares for this champion of hers who has just fallen in the lists, although the fact has become rather patent of late to her intimate friends. 'He always fails,' she mutters to herself, 'when I set my heart on his succeeding.'

Alec Merriott strides disconsolately back to the pavilion. 'What cursed luck,' he thought. 'If ever I wished to make a score

it was to-day, and I never felt more like doing it. As for making a woman comprehend the fatality of being bowled off one's pads, that is a thing useless to think of.'

'Hard lines, Alec,' said Trentham cheerily, as he met him at the gate. 'I thought you and the Stunner were well in together; good for fifty or sixty runs before they parted you, and that you would have thoroughly broke down the bowling. Must go and see what I can do now.' And Trentham proceeded towards the vacant wicket.

Alec threw off his gloves and treacherous leg-guards, and meditated for a few minutes. 'I'll go and have it out at once,' he thought, and walked away towards the Remingtons' carriage.

'You were right, I am afraid, in what you said the other day, Miss Remington,' he observed, when he reached it. 'Your taking an interest in my proceedings seems to be an evil augury.'

It was an unlucky speech in Lia’s present frame of mind.

‘I gave you due warning, Captain Merriott,’ she replied sharply; ‘but I did think you could play cricket, and that therefore my presence might prove innocuous.’

‘I’m not so very bad, although I have been unlucky to-day,’ returned Alec grimly.

‘You are. I came here on purpose to see you make runs; you know it. Why didn’t you do it?’ and Lia’s eyes flashed with indignation.

‘Couldn’t,’ replied the Lancer curtly. ‘We can’t be always successful.’

‘You never are when I want you to be. As you say, I believe I am your evil genius. We must try and remedy that in future.’

‘What do you mean?’ enquired Alec between his teeth.

‘Oh, nothing; only that I shall take care not to be present at any of Captain Merriott’s *failures* in future,’ retorted Miss Remington, bitterly.

Alec's blue eyes flashed fiercely. There was a light in them that Lia had never seen yet, as he looked her full in the face and rejoined : ' I regret extremely that I persuaded you to come here to-day, but at all events there is some excellent music to compensate you for the mistake.'

The Guards' band rang out a selection from Faust as he spoke ; and, gravely lifting his hat, Alec made his adieu.

But there were other lookers-on upon whom the fall of Merriott's wicket had made considerable impression. Foremost of these, perhaps, may be particularised a slightly grizzled man, a little the wrong side of forty, neatly attired in a single-breasted pepper-and-salt coat, longish waistcoat, and trowsers fitting rather tightly over the boot. He was seated on a bench in front of the tavern, and discoursing rather learnedly and dogmatically upon the match to his neighbours.

' Now you'll see something like cricket,' he remarked, as Merriott took his place at

the wicket. 'These here two captings are rather a caution to see in together. That Crashington, you see, he'll drive 'em all over the ground, while the t'other he cuts 'em mostly; not but what he can hit 'em too, when required.'

'He's a good player, is he?' enquired a bystander.

'Is he?' retorted Butters, contemptuously (for that worthy it was). 'That's Captain Merriott, the best gentleman rider, best pigeon shot and batsman, in England; that's wot he is and who he is. You can't have been about *much* not to know *him* when you sees him. Brayvo!' he continued, as Alec made his before-mentioned cut for three. 'That's your sort; puts 'em where he likes, he does. These here Guards ain't much account to a bat like the capting.'

Enthusiastic grew Mr. Butters as the hard-hitting Rifleman rattled the bowling about. Then came the fatal over, and Merriott's wicket went down.

‘Alloa,’ ejaculated the cockney whom Mr. Butters had put down with so high a hand. ‘Puts ’em vere he pleases, does he? Vy, he’s put it into his own vicket this time. Them Guards ain’t no haccount to ’im, ain’t they? Oh, my heye! Alloa, guv’ner, ’ow about the great Capting What-d’ye-call-’im, eh?’

Yes; he has exposed himself to it all. Great men, alas! are rarely devoid of vanity, and Mr. Butters is no exception to the rule. He had glorified the firm of Butters and Merriott a little prematurely; and the result is, has laid himself open to the ribaldry of the bystanders. He rose sullenly from his seat, muttered something about there was no accounting for flukes, treated the challenge of the cockney to back the Guards against the ‘Haldershot lot’ for a bob with contemptuous indifference, and walked away in dudgeon.

Do you know the old story of the maid-servant of the French *curé*, who so prided

herself on the order and brightness of her kitchen furniture, and was so fond of exhibiting it to the parishioners? It is told in 'Butler's Reminiscences,' how at first she said, '*Tout cela est à Monsieur le Curé;*' then, '*Tout cela est à Monsieur le Curé et à moi;*' then, '*Tout cela est à moi et à Monsieur le Curé;*' then, '*Tout cela est à moi.*'

Now Mr. Butters had thoroughly carried out this train of thought as far as the third stage. He invariably spoke, as I have said before, of his master's performances as what 'we' have been doing, and it is only fair to add he felt his master's failures deeply. He was terribly put out at the bad luck of this afternoon, and walked moodily towards the newly-reclaimed ground at the east end of the enclosure.

Suddenly a trim figure, in a most coquettish bonnet, confronted him, and Mademoiselle Suzanne exclaimed, '*Bonjour, Monsieur Bout-tare,*' as she stretched out her hand.

'How do, Ma'amzelle? Very hot, ain't

it?' observed Joe, as he shook hands and cast a malignant glance at Suzanne's cavalier.

'Why, you never come see us now?' enquired the soubrette. 'You no been dis long time. Me expect you *tous les jours*. You forget what I tell you about *mon droit*. *Scélérat!* why you no come?'

This utter obliviousness of their last parting rather confused Butters. Suzanne had apparently no recollection that he had left her in wrath. He muttered something to the effect that *they* had been so much engaged.

'*Ce n'est pas vrai,*' replied the Frenchwoman, 'for your Mastare he come *toujours*. I no quite understand your crickets; but, *mon Dieu*, le Capitaine he seem to play de cricket no better dan he write *le roman*.'

'You're quite right, Maamzelle; you don't understand cricket,' retorted Butters gruffly. 'Don't think you understand anything much.'

'*Bête,*' said the Frenchwoman, 'I understand you ver rude.'

‘You are right, Sir; Miss Suzanne does not understand cricket. It is a game not in much repute amongst her countrymen. I, however, can sympathise with your annoyance, if I am right in supposing you take an interest in Captain Merriott. He lost his wicket by sheer bad luck. Perhaps, Miss Suzanne, you would introduce me?’

Much mollified, Butters turned towards the speaker, who was the lady’s-maid’s escort.

‘Ah! I quite forget. Let me present Monsieur Fleepington to you, Monsieur Bouttare. Him what you call it, not *avocat*, he assist de *avocat*, and been vary civeel à moi.’

He was a good-looking, rather flashily-dressed man, about five-and-twenty, with keen, dark, restless eyes, that seemed to take in everything.

‘Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Butters. As Miss Suzanne says, I am employed in the lower branches of the legal

profession, or as the more vulgar denominate it, am an attorney's clerk.'

'Dere now, you know each oder. We make a little *promenade*, eh?'

'I ain't partial to lawyers as a rule, Mister Flippinton; but you understand cricket, and that's a point in your favour anyhow,' retorted the ungracious Joe.

'But Mr. Flippington was not to be rebuffed. He accommodated himself to Butters with such tact, and finally displayed such familiarity with turf matters, that the worthy Joe completely melted, and became quite pleased with his new acquaintance. Suzanne at last began to pout a little at being so much left out of the conversation, and then the politic Flippington suggested an adjournment to a tavern he knew of, just outside the gate, for purposes of refreshment. Duly fed with cakes and wine, the soubrette became herself again, and flirted with her two admirers with an *aplomb* deserving of the highest commendation. At last they escorted

her to the omnibus destined to convey her into the vicinity of her home ; and then, with mutual expressions of good-will, the two separated, little thinking under what circumstances they were destined to meet again.

Mr. Butters, though much soothed, is yet troubled with some slight twinges of jealousy, as he turns once more into Lord’s to see the finish of the match. He has gathered that Suzanne made Flippington’s acquaintance in a second-class carriage on the rail when she was travelling with her mistress ; that he has occasionally seen her since ; and that he escorted her to Lord’s by special appointment.

‘ *Faute de vous,*’ she whispered to him, as she got into the omnibus. ‘ You nevare come near me ; I could not come here alone.’

Those theories about serpents, I am afraid, had been tremendously shakened in Mr. Butters’s mind by the events of the afternoon ; and yet they should have been strengthened, had he not, like most of us, forgot his wisdom at the smile of a woman.

Small consolation does he derive from witnessing the finish of the match. Although the Stunner and Trentham performed prodigies of valour, and made very warm work for the fielders before they separated ; although the Camp eleven died hard generally ; yet, when the last wicket fell, Aldershot was still thirty-eight runs behindhand, and the Brigade were hailed the victors.

‘ Good match, and we played game to the last,’ said Trentham. ‘ But for Alec Merriott’s bad luck, it might have been a close thing. Alec’s luck has been rather harder than lookers-on wot of.’

CHAPTER XVI.

‘MADAME LUCE.’

IN Upper Street ‘merrie Islington’ stands a shop, which, although not very large, is an extremely fashionable one in that locality. The board over the doorway is simply inscribed ‘Madame Luce, Marchande de Modes.’ The suburbs have their Worths and Elises equally with the West End, and Madame Luce is now the fashionable dress-maker of that quarter. The higher circles of Islington do not consider a dress can be properly made except by Madame Luce. Some seven years ago Madame Luce opened a small shop in that vicinity for the sale of ladies’ fancy goods, and announced herself also as a *modiste*. The little shop thrived. It soon became noised in the neighbourhood

that there was no emporium where you had such a choice of fancy goods as at Madame Luce's. Adventurous spirits tried her as a dressmaker, and rapidly it became bruited abroad that Madame's taste was exquisite. Some of her creations made the Islington world thrill with delight; and the idea of going west for dresses became quite a matter of derision with the ladies of those parts.

Madame Luce multiplied her assistants as her connexion extended; and finally felt warranted upon moving into the better position and more extensive premises she at present occupies.

A brisk, fair-haired, lively little woman, about eight-and-twenty, with blue eyes, and a figure that her customers often envy. The scarves or shawls that she throws so gracefully and coquettishly over her own shoulders don't quite present the same appearance when their fair buyers try them upon their own persons. She is so graceful and lady-like, that, with the majority of her customers,

Madame Luce is quite a pet. She is always dressed to perfection, and wears silks quite as rich as the wealthiest of her patrons. She can well afford to do so ; for what with the fancy business downstairs, and the dress-making above, Madame's business is now a highly lucrative one.

In a hansom cab sits Wyndham Gwynne, absorbed in thought. His mind is busied about the events of seven or eight years ago. He recalls the dire entanglements racing involved him in at that time. He muses over that six weeks' fishing down at Lasterton the summer before he left England. Then his brow darkens as fancy conjures up a scene by Southampton water ; the figure of a woman whom his strong hand arrests from rushing unaneled into the presence of her Maker. A fair, tear-stained, passion-tost face, once more lies sobbing on his breast, and the bright lights of Southampton twinkle around him. His life is by no means stainless ; yet his conduct on that occasion ought to count

as something in his favour. Once more he thinks over how he half led, half carried, that poor hysterical girl back to his hotel, had her put to bed, and then sent for a doctor; how he made arrangements for joining at Marseilles the P. and O. boat, which he had come down to Southampton to embark in; escorted the waif he had saved back to town, placed her in quiet decent lodgings, and made arrangements with his solicitor that she was to be put in the way of earning her living as soon as she had sufficiently recovered.

He had been amply repaid. It was not merely that the bare money he had advanced had been long ago returned, but many a grateful touching letter, many a trifling memento, had come to him in his days of exile, from the shop at Islington.

Yes; the time had been when the now fashionable *modiste* of that district would have fain sought oblivion from her woes in the dark gurgling waters of Southampton;

and, but for the intervention of a strong, resolute hand, had tossed a self-slain corse around the Needles.

But the cab whirls rapidly along, and at last pulls up at the top of Upper Street. Wyndham descends, pays the driver, and leisurely proceeds down the thoroughfare. He reaches Madame Luce's at last; pauses, and peeps into the shop. Two or three smart young women are busied behind the counters, and have evidently plenty to do in attending to the behests of the lady customers with whom the establishment is crowded.

Wyndham walks in, and seating himself, prepares to wait for his turn to be attended to. He has not to wait long before a trim damsel glides up to him and enquires 'What he may please to want?'

'I wish to see Madame Luce,' replies Wyndham.

'Madame is particularly engaged just now. Is it nothing I can do for you, Sir?'

'No; I wish to see Madame herself. Stay;

I suppose you can take or send a note up to her ?’

‘Certainly,’ replied the girl.

‘Then lend me a sheet of paper and a pencil.’

These were quickly produced, and Wyndham scribbled half-a-dozen lines and handed them over to the shop-girl for delivery.

She slipped upstairs with the note, and returned in two or three minutes, and handed him his answer with a look of much curiosity, saying, ‘Madame will see you in a few minutes, Sir, and desired me to give you this.’

Gwynne tore open his note. ‘See you ? my God, yes. Please, *please* don’t go away. I shall be free in a few minutes. Oh, do wait. —Luce.’

For something like ten minutes Wyndham sat quietly watching the business of the place. That fashionably-dressed bronzed, bearded man, became an object of great curiosity both to the ladies before and the ladies behind the counter during that time. It was not

often gentlemen were seen in those precincts. The present intruder, moreover, was altogether of a type with which they were unacquainted. Pretty Madame Luce had always been rather a mystery to her more intelligent customers. The refinement of her manner, her love and knowledge of music, and one or two other circumstances, had more than once induced great curiosity regarding her antecedents. But of her life, prior to her settlement in Islington, she never spoke. That she could both play and sing really well, that she had both French and German at command, was known to many of her patrons and to most of her assistants; but even her nationality was a mystery that had never been solved. She spoke excellent English, although a slight accent denoted that she was of foreign extraction. One more fact inquisitive Islington had noted—that she had apparently no relations, and that the sole friend who ever visited her, not acquired since her settlement in those parts, was an elderly grey-

headed gentleman, who at long intervals came out in a quiet well-appointed brougham. Islington dubbed him a lawyer, and Islington was right. He was Wyndham Gwynne's solicitor. In her improved circumstances of late years, Madame Luce might be also justified in calling him hers.

Quite unconscious of the curiosity his appearance had created, Wyndham continued to gaze dreamily at the buyers and sellers in the scene before him ; till the shop-girl, who had before addressed him, once more glided to his side and said, ' Madame will see you now, Sir ; that servant-girl will show you the way.'

Gwynne glanced in the direction indicated, where a neat-looking maid was just peeping into the back of the shop, and with a courteous ' Many thanks,' rose and followed the handmaiden up stairs.

' Madame is within,' she observed, throwing open a door, and, leaving Gwynne to make his way into the room, vanished.

Hardly had he passed the threshold when

a sunny little figure flew across the room, two small white hands seized his, and, standing on tiptoe, Madame Luce kissed him on both cheeks.

'Welcome, ten thousand times welcome, my preserver!' she exclaimed. 'How I have prayed to see you once again, and our Lady of Grace has vouchsafed to listen to me. How bronzed you have become in all these years? Yet I should have known you anywhere. But sit down,' continued the enthusiastic little woman, as the tears welled up into her eyes. 'Tell me all about yourself! And oh! how good you've been to me.'

'From your letters, Luce, I knew you were doing well; but what I see beats my most sanguine expectations.'

'Yes, and it is all you. You saved a poor heart-broken girl from a great sin, to become for her a rich, and at all events a happy, woman. Do you know what would give her more pleasure now than anything?'

'What?' said Wyndham, laughing.

‘ Ah ! don’t laugh. I should be so glad if you wanted money, that the girl you saved could show she had been worth saving.’

‘ No, Luce ; thank goodness, I’m afloat again. But,’ he continued, as he saw a shade fall over her face, ‘ if ever I’m in trouble again, I will come to you before anyone.’

‘ Ah ! that is good of you,’ she replied, as a smile rippled over her face. ‘ You won’t forget you have a share in the business ? ’

‘ I have something better, I flatter myself,’ returned Wyndham, gravely. ‘ I’ve a share in the heart of the proprietress.’

‘ Indeed you have, and a very large share, too, after all you’ve done.’

‘ Pooh, pooh, Luce,’ interrupted Wyndham ; ‘ I won’t hear any more of that. I did a little, and you’ve done a great deal. How hard you must have worked ? ’

‘ No, it was not that altogether ; though I have worked, too. But I vowed, when you left me on my sick bed, that if God should vouchsafe me my strength again, you should

never repent that you had stood between me and eternity. I sinned heavily when I attempted my life, but otherwise I was not so much to blame. I was too ill to tell you all then ; but as heaven is my judge, I believed myself married to him when I fled with him from Lasterton.’

Wyndham started. ‘Do you mean to say that any form of marriage passed between you, Luce?’

‘Yes ; I was married, as I thought, in the Baptist school-room at Lasterton. It was not till six weeks afterwards I found out, by accident, that that marriage was a mockery. The knowledge drove me nearly mad, I had so loved him. And even now you tell me I don’t know his true name,’ and Luce dropped her head upon her hand.

Luce Schwerin was the *modiste’s* genuine designation, though for obvious reasons she had dropped her patronymic when starting business in Islington.

‘No ; my money difficulties at that time

were great, and it was upon my account that we both passed under *nommes de guerre* at Lasterton. Creditors are not always sagacious; and though my going to India of course afforded the best chance of satisfying them in the long run, I was apprehensive they might interfere to prevent it.'

Luce mused for some little time; then, raising her head, said, 'Tell me how Ernest Carlton is called in reality? I think I have a right to know; but it shall be as you deem best.'

'I saw no reason to disturb you on your sick bed by telling you he wasn't Ernest Carlton; what could it matter? In all these years, though I long ago told you that was not his name, I have seen no reason to let you know how he was called in the world. You were never in difficulties; your little hands were always earning their own bread and cheese, and rather more. Assistance from him was no object.'

'No,' said Luce, 'I had plenty of assist-

ance, and knew where to ask for more if I had wanted it. You have been very good to me, my guardian. It was not for that. But do you think a woman can quite forget her dream? As the poet of my country says :—

“ Time was all heaven was pressing down upon me,
In all *his* words, in every look of *his*.”

We never quite forget that, strive as we may. I want nothing from him. I never wish to see him again. Still a woman may be excused that she would fain know for whom she sacrificed herself—to whom she gave her first love—by whom she was so cruelly betrayed.’

‘You’re right, Luce; and I see no reason why you should not know. Ernest De Vitre is Ernest Carlton’s proper appellation.’

‘Ernest De Vitre?’ murmured the *modiste*, softly. ‘I shall remember that name. Yes, as long as I live. I who so loved and trusted

him ; and he was afraid to trust me even with his name.'

For a few minutes she sat lost in thought, then dashed a tear hastily away from the long lashes and exclaimed, ' This will never do, my guardian, after all these years of exile, to welcome you in this *triste* fashion. Shall I give you some tea, or will you have some wine ? ' and Luce rang.

' Tea, thanks ; ' and as she busied herself about the arrangements thereof, it suddenly flashed upon Gwynne how like Luce was to Lady Mallandaine. It was by no means one of those singular likenesses occasionally seen that quite mystify the common acquaintance of the hapless pair. Nobody knowing either of them tolerably well would be in the least likely to mistake one for the other. To begin upon, the *modiste* was four or five years older than Lady Mallandaine, and though there was a strong facial resemblance, it was easy to make distinction between them ; but in figure, height, the colour of

their hair, and general *tournure*, there was certainly a marvellous similitude.

'And how do you like your present life, Luce?' enquired Wyndham, as she presented him with a cup of tea.

'Very much. I am far happier than I was in my old governess days at Lasterton, although the people I lived with there were kind to me, and made my bread of dependence as little bitter as might be. Still, here I'm my own mistress, and have many friends. I have always plenty to do, and my own girls—I mean my workpeople—look up to me and consult me about their little troubles. I think I'm a popular mistress, and have a good name as such hereabouts. At all events, when I have a vacancy I've no lack of applicants for the situation.'

'And you're growing rich, Luce?'

'Ah, yes; I must show you my books some time. Dear old Mr. Donaldson (the solicitor) told me last time he was here that I was the best woman of business he had

ever encountered. He invests my money for me, you know ; you may not think it a great deal, but I do. Fancy, I've a banker's book now ;' and Luce broke out into a low musical laugh, marvellously like that old laugh of Cecile's of some twelve months back.

'I can't tell you how pleased I am,' said Wyndham as he put down his tea-cup. 'It was worth coming all the way back from India to find you so well and so happy.'

'Yes, and it wanted that to complete it. I so longed that you should come home to see the results of all your kindness. I can't thank you ; I never mean to try again. You know I couldn't wish you harm, but I can't help feeling that if you should some day want a tiny bit of assistance it would be nice.'

'Don't think I'll spare you any of my troubles in future,' laughed Wyndham, as he rose. 'I must be going now.'

'But I shall see you again soon ?' asked Luce quickly.

‘Yes, and often, I hope.’ He paused, and looking steadily at her, said, ‘You’re quite clear about what you told me with regard to that marriage ceremony?’

‘Quite. Such as it was, I swear it took place.’

‘And what do you feel still about that dream as you termed it?’

Luce’s cheeks flushed. ‘I will tel you the truth,’ she said. ‘They were the happiest weeks of my life. What I suffered on awaking from it no need to tell, as you witnessed my misery. It is all over now, and a memory of the past. My work leaves me no time to be a *mouton qui rêve*.’

‘Good-bye, Luce.’ A warm pressure of her hand, and Wyndham was gone.

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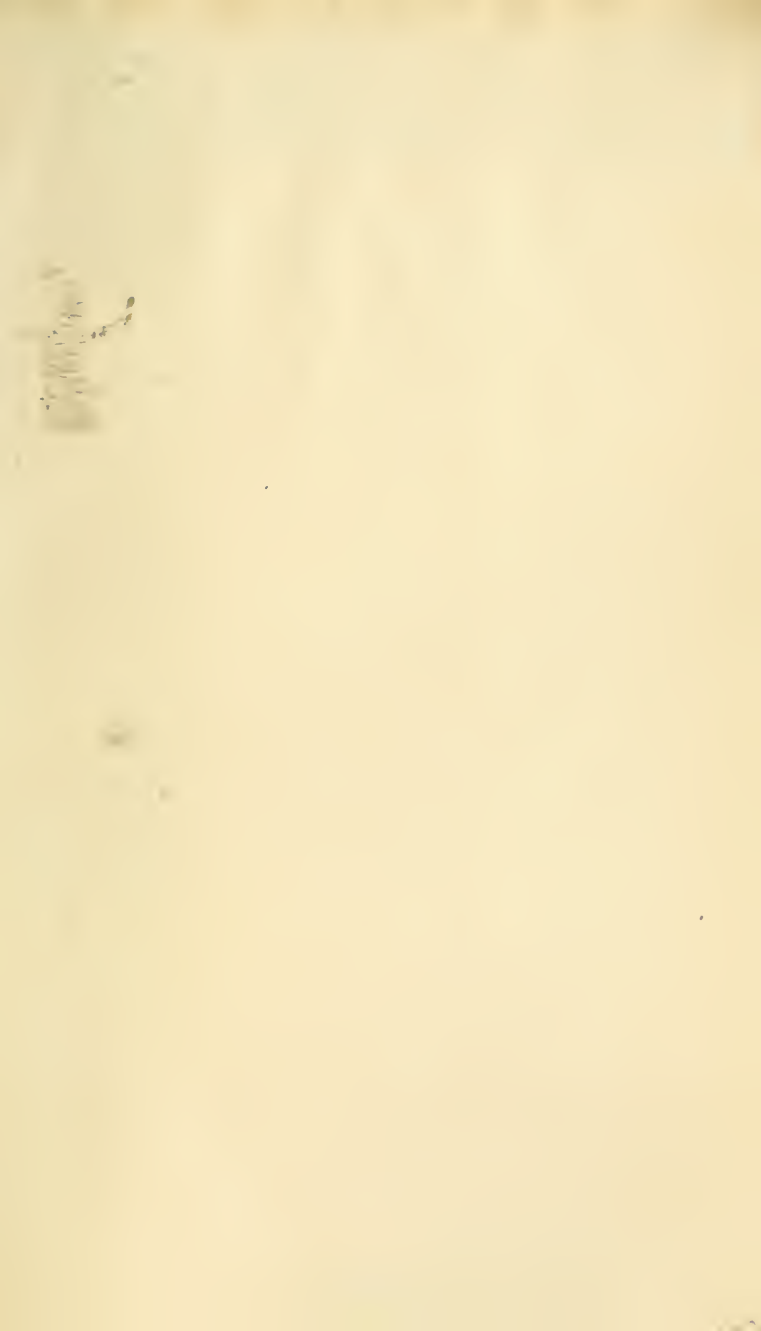
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